DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 494 CE 075 458

AUTHOR	Bloomer, Martin; Hodkinson, Phil
TITLE	Moving into FE: The Voice of the Learner.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Development Agency, London (England).
ISSN	ISSN-1460-7034
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	105p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Further Education Development Agency, Publications Dept., Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7RG, United Kingdom (12 British pounds).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
JOURNAL CIT	FEDA Report; v2 n3 1997
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Attitude Change; *College Students; *Educational Attitudes; Educational Needs; Educational Opportunities; Educational Practices; Foreign Countries; *High School Students; High Schools; Longitudinal Studies; Postsecondary Education; *Student Attitudes; Student Educational Objectives; Technical Institutes; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*General National Vocational Qualif (England); *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The changes occurring in students' attitudes as they move from secondary to postsecondary education were examined in a study of a cohort of 79 British students. The cohort, which was confined to students who had given clear indications of their intentions to proceed to post-16 studies in a further education (FE) college, included equal numbers of males and females, representatives of the Asian ethnic community, and roughly equal representation of students intending to proceed to the following: A-level or international baccalaureate courses; General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) advanced courses (or the equivalent); and other full-time post-16 courses. The 79 students were interviewed initially while in year 11 of secondary school. Fifty of the students were reinterviewed during the second half of their first term in FE. Seventeen teachers, FE tutors, and parents were also interviewed. The interviews focused on the following: anticipations of and reactions to learning opportunities in FE; attitudes toward learning; and approaches to being a student. Changes in the students' attitudes were identified and discussed from the standpoint of their implications for teaching practice. Contains 40 references. Appended is a list of the 79 students' year 12 destinations. (MN)

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Moving into FE:
the voice of the learner

Martin Bloomer and Phil Hodkinson

report

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Moving into FE:
the voice of the learner

Martin Bloomer and Phil Hodkinson

with Colin Burke, Bruce Butt and Debbie Morgan

report

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Published by the **Further Education Development Agency** (FEDA), Dumbarton House, 68 Oxford Street, London W1N 0DA
Tel: [0171] 436 0020 Fax: [0171] 436 0349

Feedback and orders should be directed to: **FEDA Publications Department**, Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7RG
Tel: [01761] 462 503 Fax: [01761] 463 140

Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Editor: **Jennifer Rhys**

Designer: **Mike Pope**

Printed by: **Henry Ling Limited, Dorchester**

Cover photograph: **Telegraph Colour Library**

ISSN 1460-7034

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Preface

The research project upon which this publication is based forms part of the FEDA Strategic Research Programme. It focuses on the experiences of learners and was carried out by researchers at Exeter University and Manchester Metropolitan University. Other projects in the programme focus on learners and information technology, colleges and their communities, the funding of FE and economic development. The programme aims to raise the profile of research about further education in a way that is designed to influence policy. The project upon which this publication is based will be extended throughout 1997–8.

Acknowledgements

The project would not have been possible without the considerable practical help provided by the schools and colleges which allowed us access to their students. While we hope that we did not place unreasonable demands upon people, we are mindful that there was inevitably some disruption to their work. Though we cannot name them, we are particularly grateful to those who assisted us, not least for their continued good humour and their trust.

The success of the project also owes much to the sensitivity and dedication of Colin Burke, Bruce Butt and Debbie Morgan who conducted the interviews and assisted in the detailed planning and data analysis. The richness of the data that we have been able to draw upon is due to the care and effort which they invested.

By no means least, we owe a considerable debt to the young people who allowed us into their lives. Not only did they give willingly of their time but they did so in good spirit; not only were they prepared to talk to us at length on a wide range of sometimes sensitive issues but they did so with openness and honesty. We are also grateful to others – Martin Johnson and Anna Reisenberger, teachers, tutors, guidance officers and parents – who, too, gave freely of their time and wisdom. Thank you.

Note: Pseudonyms have been used for all names of people, places and colleges in this report.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Learning is the *raison d'être* of further education (FE). The need to remind ourselves of something as obvious as this arises from the policy climate in which FE has had to work in England and Wales throughout the 1990s. Shaped by Conservative government[1] ideology and driven by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the emphasis has been on managerial and curriculum change tightly linked to the achievement of 'outcomes'. The catchword has been 'value for money'. In this book, we draw upon data from the first part of a major research study[2] into young students' perceptions of their own learning experiences, in order to throw light upon the meaning of value and learning in FE.

There is an extensive body of official and semi-official literature on the subjects of post-16 learning and progression (for example, Cole and Eraut, 1991; DES et al, 1991; FEU, 1995; Reisenberger and Sanders, 1997). However, much of that work has focused upon questions concerning the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of specific practices, adopting only criteria intrinsic to those practices. Moreover, where such literature has addressed learning directly, it has often separated it from many of its contextual complexities. One example of this is work on 'learning styles', which has focused almost exclusively on students' supposedly inherent psychological differences or preferences, and the techniques used by teachers in attempting to match those preferences with opportunities for

learning (for example, FEU, 1992; Hayes and Allinson, 1996; Honey and Mumford, 1992). While there are merits in works of this type, there are also limitations. They offer a series of fragmented views of the student experience, giving no account of the social conditions in which learning takes place. Also, on the matter of students' learning careers, much published work is based upon assumptions that careers are determined by a succession of choices based upon an objective knowledge of both self and the options available (CBI, 1993; Bennett, et al, 1992). Such models underestimate the subjective foundations of personal knowledge and largely ignore the cultural, political, moral, economic and other contexts with which it is inextricably connected. More importantly, in its pursuit of the efficient matching of students' interests with post-16 learning opportunities, this sort of literature makes little allowance for the continuing discovery and development of new interests which occur throughout late adolescence. Under such a view, students who seek to change courses or withdraw from them are seen as having 'failed' or 'dropped out' (Audit Commission, 1993). They are rarely considered as having discovered new self-knowledge or new directions for their personal careers.

There is now a growing body of academic research which has attempted to capture students' wider experiences of post-16 education. There has been a series of studies drawing from the Youth Cohort Survey (YCS) (see Furlong, 1992). The YCS was predominantly questionnaire based and gives an excellent picture of the patterns of progression through FE. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) initiative into 16-19 education produced complementary, in-depth studies of four different geographical locations on Britain. This work effectively described the ways in which a wide range of educational and non-educational factors contributed to what the authors call career trajectories (Banks et al, 1992). As part of the same study, contributors to Bates and Riseborough (1993) provide ethnographic accounts of the experiences of groups of students on different further education courses. It is through such research that the complexity, dynamic tension and processes of students' evolving experiences are made visible and a more complete understanding of the student experience is achievable. However, none of these studies took learning as its central focus, and even in the ethnographic studies, emphases are placed more heavily upon group than upon individual experiences.[3]

The research reported here was designed to deepen our understanding of students' experiences of learning and focused on the transfer of young people from school to FE. It was designed to identify factors which have a bearing upon learning careers and to document the processes by which young people's dispositions to learning and their decisions about learning are arrived at. Furthermore, the research was designed to focus on the stories of individual young people, though, of course, we were looking for patterns in those stories. The study also focused on students' in-course experiences of learning, to identify factors which have an important bearing upon them.

Previous research projects conducted by us have had a strong bearing upon this study, and we have used a number of concepts here which we have employed elsewhere. In particular, the two-year Leverhulme-funded project, **Teaching and Learning in 16–19 Education** (Bloomer, 1997) also focused upon students' experiences of learning. The theory of learning generated in that project introduced two central concepts of studentship and learning career. Studentship refers to the processes by which students construct personal learning careers through their active engagement with learning opportunities available to them within the constraints of social, cultural and other circumstances. It implies role making rather than role taking, knowledge making rather than knowledge taking and curriculum making rather than curriculum taking. A learning career is the ongoing unfolding of a person's dispositions to, and their engagement with, knowledge and learning opportunities.

A recent study of **Training Credits in Action** was conducted by Hodkinson and Sparkes (Hodkinson, et al, 1996). This focused on the pragmatically rational ways in which young people made decisions about training and employment. Those decisions were, in turn, located in the person's life history and could only be understood as part of their wider identities. The study showed that young people's occupational careers evolved through periods of routine interspersed with turning points of various types. A turning point is a time when a person's career undergoes a transformation. There are close parallels between these ideas and Bloomer's theory of

learning careers. This study has given us an opportunity to explore the links between them, as both sets of ideas were challenged and modified in the light of the data generated.

The methodology

One hundred and fifty-four (154) interviews were conducted with young people and with others who had witnessed their learning. In January 1995, three type of colleges (one general FE, one tertiary and one sixth form) were invited to participate in the study. The sixth form college was located in an area with a significant population of south Asian ethnic origin. An initial cohort of 79[4] Year 11 secondary school pupils was identified, according to the following criteria:

- The cohort was confined to students who had given clear indications of their intentions to proceed to post-16 studies in the college participating in the study.
- The cohort included equal numbers of male and female students, contained representatives of the Asian ethnic community and roughly equal representation of students intending to proceed to:
    i) A-level or International Baccalaureate courses,
    ii) GNVQ Advanced courses (or equivalent)
    iii) other full-time post-16 courses.

Initial interviews took place between March and May, 1995. Of the original 79, 50 students were reinterviewed between October and December 1995 during the second half of their first term in FE. A small number were interviewed for a third time, in June 1996[5]. In addition, 17 school teachers, FE tutors and parents were also interviewed.

The selection of individual students within the overall sampling frame was done on the basis of 'interesting cases'. We did not seek a representative sample but one which offered the maximum richness and diversity of students' experiences of learning in FE, including the apparently ordinary.

The interviews were semi-structured. For each phase, a separate interview schedule was prepared in order to ensure compatibility of approach across the interviews. However, each interviewer was free to ask the questions in any order and in a manner that fitted with the conversation held with each interviewee. Each was encouraged to explore the issues behind the questions, to discover what the young people interviewed felt was significant about their experiences and to enable them to tell their stories in the ways which they considered most appropriate.

The interview schedules were based on two principles. Firstly, interviewees were questioned about their past and contemporaneous experiences of learning; about events and experiences which they felt had affected their learning; and about their hopes and plans for the future. Secondly, each was encouraged to move backwards and forwards, between description, explanation and evaluation in the course of their accounts. In these ways, we attempted to explore their perceptions of learning and of relevant contextual factors. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes and was tape recorded and transcribed.

Analysis commenced as soon as the first phase interviews had been completed. Each researcher analysed the student transcripts for which they were responsible. At this stage the emphasis was on understanding young people's perceptions of their learning in secondary education and their aspirations for FE and beyond. Summary accounts of these individual analyses were shared across the team. We looked carefully for patterns within the stories, and began tentatively to test the models of learning career and of pragmatically rational decision making against the data.

We used that early analysis to identify areas for particular focus in the second phase interviews. Some of these areas were of general significance across the sample. Others were of interest in particular cases. Just before the second phase interviews, each of the original transcripts was re-examined. This served three purposes:

- our tentatively produced models were tested against the original data upon which they were based
- the individual student stories were re-interpreted in the light of our subsequent analysis and the original data

- specific areas for further exploration, confirmation and/or clarification were identified for each interviewee.

Analysis of the second phase interviews proceeded in a similar manner to the first but, this time, the individual stories were analysed on the basis of the first and second interviews taken together. During this process our interpretations of individual stories gradually firmed up. Then we moved beyond the individual stories and developed the conceptual models that are presented here. Where relevant, we incorporated into the analysis the data contained in the interviews with non-students, and also a wide range of supplementary information gleaned from the colleges and schools involved. In developing our interpretations of what we were told, we have refined and altered our original theorising, a process which is on-going.

We believe that this study has been effective in uncovering the complexity and variety of young people's learning careers. That effectiveness has been greatly enhanced by the way in which the project has complemented and been complemented by the Leverhulme and the Training Credits studies. The study has also been theoretically rich. Research of this type, when it is of suitable quality, can provide the sort of vivid description that allows the reader to begin to understand and empathise with some of the young people concerned. It is partly for this reason that we have included extensive verbatim quotations in the report – to allow the students themselves to shine through. The interpretations placed upon the descriptions can give readers a greater understanding of underlying issues. The value and relevance of studies such as this do not depend on the size or representativeness of the sample. In a statistical sense, what follows is not generalisable, but the ideas developed do have a broader application. Even though the models of learning careers presented below are derived from the data in this study, their credibility does not stand upon the sample we used. Rather, it is for those reading the book to judge the extent to which our interpretations ring true to them, and the extent to which they add to their understanding of the nature of learning in FE, of the experiences of young people in FE, and of the potential impact of current policies in FE.

The structure of the book

The rest of this book reports the findings from the early part of our ongoing research project, **The Experience of the Learner in FE**. In Chapter 2, we concentrate upon the young people's perceptions of, and reactions to, the learning opportunities they encountered. We describe their anticipations of FE, showing that few had any clear understanding of the ways in which it might be different from school and how, having had made the transition, the vast majority were enthusiastic about their new post-16 education. We report in some detail (though pseudonymously) on students' perceptions of the nature of knowledge, their beliefs about what learning activities were appropriate to them, and their perceptions of the subjects and courses they were studying.

Students' views of the nature of knowledge were varied and, for some, changed over time. They reported a wide range of different learning activities, varying from didactic presentations, through whole class discussions to more interactive project and assignment work. However, the only major difference between A-levels and GNVQ, on the basis of our analyses of the early phase data, appeared to be that GNVQ students were more likely to leave the classroom to collect factual information. Finally, we report that over half of our sample had changed their intended courses between their final term in school and their first term in college. The significance of these changes and the reasons for them are varied, but in some cases resulted in young people following courses which they had either not chosen at all or had chosen hastily with little considered thought.

In Chapter 3, we describe and analyse students' dispositions to learning and to occupational careers. These assist explanation of the perceptions described in Chapter 2. By dispositions, we mean often intuitive or tacit values of learning – values which, themselves, are closely related to other aspects of a person's life and its wider contexts. Such dispositions underpin students' various reactions to learning opportunities. They can change over time, either gradually or as some sudden transformation, and are sometimes intimately related to dispositions towards an occupational career. In the case of some students, learning decisions were clearly shaped by specific career interests. More often, though, they were not. Many approached FE with a view to keeping their options open, while others selected their

studies for intrinsic reasons. Many career intentions seemed to be insubstantial, and liable to rapid and radical change. Choices of course and institution were also sometimes influenced by perceptions of status. We also offer an initial appraisal of young people's studentship – the ways in which they took control of their learning opportunities. Most of our sample were happily conforming to what teachers expected, though a few had retreated from original commitments, or were beginning to invent their own approaches. Rather more were showing early signs of strategic compliance: that is, going through the motions, but with no shared commitment.

Learning careers form the focus of Chapter 4. By learning career, we mean the ways in which dispositions to learning and career blend with a wide range of other factors as part of a person's habitus and even identity. We use the term 'career' to indicate that these combined dispositions can and do change over time, for a variety of complex reasons. This book focuses upon one time of change for many young people – the transition from school to FE. Three types of learning career were distinguished, though the boundaries between them are arbitrary:

- Some students showed little or no change between the two interviews.
- Others appeared to have undergone sudden transformations.
- A third group appeared to be experiencing gradual change. The causes and effects of these changes are complex, making precise predictions of the future impossible.

In the final chapter, we apply the lessons from this study to aspects of the previous Conservative government's policy for FE. We conclude that, in several serious respects, that policy misunderstood and/or misrepresented FE, learning and young people's learning careers. We argue that instead of seeing normal FE progression as a gradual narrowing of educational focus, where changes in direction are dysfunctional aberrations, we need to see FE as a transitional period, where widening of horizons and personal growth are matters for acclaim. If, as we claim they should, changes in direction become an accepted 'normal' part of the FE experience for many young students, FE will require a radical rethinking of many of the curriculum policy and management approaches that were current when this

research was conducted. Our research suggests that, at present, FE institutions are achieving a good measure of success in meeting students' needs but they are often doing so in spite of national FE policy. We must hope that the arrival of the Labour government will provide the opportunity for a rethinking of post-16 education and training. It is for all of us working within and with FE to force these issues into the policy arena, in the interests of the students that FE will continue to serve.

Chapter 2

Learning opportunities in FE: anticipations and reactions

One way of understanding the context of learning for young people is as learning opportunities. Here we are primarily concerned with those opportunities which exist within formal FE settings. Learning opportunities are both objectively and subjectively defined. They are in one sense outside the student, as in the provision of an A-level syllabus, or in teachers' decisions about learning activities. But learning opportunities are also created by students in response to those external conditions as they perceive them. In this chapter we focus on the ways in which students perceived the learning opportunities they encountered and upon the ways in which they interpreted those opportunities. We begin with an account of what they thought those new learning opportunities would be like: interviewers's questions are in bold, the answers in italic.

Anticipations of FE

Most of the young people had only the vaguest notion of what FE was going to be like. Some said that they did not know.

I don't know really, I just want to hope that I get in first – get into college. I've got to get the grades for my GCSEs yet. I haven't really

thought about it ... I haven't thought about what it's gonna be like. (Sally Haines)

In general, they assumed that FE was going to be less 'formal' and a more 'adult' environment, and many looked forward to that.

It will be a lot more informal than here – so friends tell me. You get to call teachers by their first names. It's a totally different atmosphere from here. I don't like being told off. I like teachers who tell you to keep going. I like it where they give you a strict atmosphere but give you an informal atmosphere – free to do your own thing. (Ishtiaq Khan)

As it turned out, Ishtiaq was one of those who found settling in to college a little difficult, finding it a bit too 'informal'. Marie Tett also anticipated increased freedom and responsibility:

The work will be more high level, more in depth, but I'm not sure what it will be ... There'll be more freedom, just 16- to18-years-olds, and you'll be treated as more grown up. It will be down to you, not teachers saying 'you've got to do this'. It's your future. They will give you all the knowledge and it's up to you to take it in.

Thinking about the sixth form college, Simon Corrigan saw freedom as being associated with the status of the people who would go there and with the ethos of the institution. He said:

I see sixth formers at the college having a very civilised environment. They'll be the best, since they'll not be there on sufferance. The atmosphere will be more geared towards learning and I'll benefit from it. There'll be more expectations about learning under your own initiatives.

Many students had an idea that the work in their FE courses would somehow be 'harder' than that which they had encountered in their GCSE courses. As Alison Holt said, 'I don't know what I'll learn, but it will

probably be harder'. Waqas Ali also spoke about 'hardness': 'One of my mates is doing A-level business studies and he's finding it hard. He said, "don't do it".'

Some students, like Sally Haines, were apprehensive about moving to FE for other, mainly social, reasons.

I wonder if I'm gonna know anybody, because if I go into dance [lessons] I'm not gonna know no-one. None of my friends are doing it; no one I know is doing it, and I'm just gonna meet new people and be really nervous really. ... It just seems big and scary. It'll be so different though. [In school] you're all in a class together with all your friends and that and you go [to college] and you're all split up.

This reaction was more common in the large tertiary college than the others. Philippa Rule, a tertiary college student, was not alone among her peers in the concerns she expressed:

I do quite like the thought of all the freedom but I do still like the school environment 'cos everyone's close, like I said.

So if there was a sixth form here would you stay?

I'm not sure really 'cos I've spent a long time at school and I think I'd be ready to leave. I will miss it here but I think I'm ready to leave now.

Is there anything you are worried about going to college?

No, not really. I'm just a bit worried I'm going to slack 'cos everyone seems to. 'Cos at the college they don't tell you to do homework, do they? They just leave it to you.

Ignorance about the processes of learning in FE was widespread. With few exceptions, students either did not know, assumed it would continue in much the same way as learning in school or, if they perceived it to be different from school learning at all, could only perceive differences in terms of crude, inexact generalisations.

> *I don't know until I get there what it will be like. I've spoken to friends who are there at the college but not about the subjects. I only know that A-levels will be harder. (Samantha Grimsey)*

There were some notable exceptions to this general pattern of ignorance. Many of those who did appear to know more had friends or close relatives already at college who had told them what to expect. Mark Knight said:

> *I know quite a few people at college at the moment. I had step-brothers that were there and then they dropped out or something, and they said that there was a lot of social life there.*

Michael Bradstock's comments are striking, because his depth of knowledge was so unusual:

> *It's supposed to be a lot more informal. So I can talk to the teachers a bit more openly. It will be a lot more frank, and on an equal basis. There's a library and a book shop as well ... You get modular tests [in science] based on the course work. You do your own experiments from scratch. You are left more on your own but you can get help, but only if you ask. When you are given a question, you go about it as you want. It's you who orders the equipment individually. It's also easier to revise because each module is a separate topic and this helps you prepare for the tests.*

The general lack of knowledge about FE was unsurprising. At the time of our first interviews the young people were still at school and concentrating on final revision and course work completion. They were absorbed by the present, which was real, urgent and, for some, relatively stressful. The move to FE still seemed a long way away. Furthermore, apart from those

with insider contacts, their sources of information about FE were limited. Many had seen official brochures and leaflets. A lot had been to open days, and nearly all had had interviews. But detail about how, say, A-level English was taught was unlikely to come their way. Also, the young people had concentrated on subject and course choices, and teaching methods and styles of learning were rarely considered as part of this process. The only partial exceptions were one or two people who chose to study GNVQ partly because they preferred course work assessment to terminal examinations.

I don't know what I'll learn in the first year. It will probably be harder [than school]. There'll be no exam at the end. It will all be based on course work. I prefer course work testing. You get more time, you can look up in books and get it right. In exams you've got to remember. In course work you get it back and it tells you what's wrong and how to improve it. (Alison Holt)

However, Alison's understanding of course work assessment comes from her experiences in school and not through an awareness of GNVQ. It should also be remembered that she said this when external examinations were imminent, and no doubt causing her some concern.

Impressions of FE after the first half term

The vast majority of our students were enthusiastic about their early experiences in FE. This was true of young people in all three institutions and all types of courses, though there were some individual exceptions, as we shall see below. Alison Holt spoke for many when she said:

I love it. I spend all my time here. I come in at nine o'clock every morning and go home at five o'clock whether I've got classes or not. It's the best way to do my work because I either go in the library or use a computer. But I come in anyway [even] when I haven't got work to do.

Several of the students said that college was not exactly what they expected. Ryan Holloway, for example, though he was enjoying his life at college, felt that the differences between school and college were not as great as he had been led to believe they would be.

It didn't live up to my expectations 'cos my sister and everyone had said, 'oh, yeah, wow ... college is like really different and it's not structured', and it is really. It's less structured but it's not as completely different as I thought it would be ... but I've grown more to like it for what it is than what I did at the beginning 'cos me and all my mates were thinking, 'it's crap!' But it's got a lot better 'cos we've realised that we're in charge of our lives really and we don't actually have to get up – they're not going to send anyone around, they'll just kick us out.

Almost everyone welcomed the more adult atmosphere. Many talked of being treated like adults rather than children, and of lecturers being more like friends than school teachers had been.

We use the teachers' first names. I suppose it's maturity in a way. They don't treat you as children; they treat you as being on the same level as them. You feel a lot more grown up. They have more respect for you. (Marie Tett)

Calling teachers by their first names – it makes quite a lot of difference to begin with. It just feels like a different atmosphere. It's not like they're up there and you're down here. Like one of my psychology teachers – she's a good laugh. She gets involved in topics and she's quite young, which helps ... They just get involved and treat you as ... you want to be, really. (Sean Keating)

Many were conscious of, and largely welcomed, the fact that they were now more personally responsible for their studies and progress. There was less 'nagging' than there had been at school.

I've got to do it off my own back. There's no teachers saying, 'you've got to do this, you've got to do that', like in school. My tutor said to us that, 'you've got to do it yourself, we're not your school teachers – you're at college – you only came here because you wanted to.' ... If college was the place where they told you what to do, I wouldn't be able to do it. I just don't like being bossed about. ... It's made me a much more happier person, going to college. (Kirsty Spiers)

For some, this additional responsibility had been daunting.

Yeah, I'm more independent. But in a way it's good and in a way it's not. It's on your own really – everything that you do – you haven't got any guidance really from the tutor – they don't ask you how you're getting on with your assignments or whatever. They take it for granted that you're gonna know. (Melanie West)

It's quite scary sometimes, because college is so different from school ... and you're on your own now and you have to sort yourself out for organisation. And it's that bit closer to not being told what to do by a teacher and working for an employer. And if you don't do what you're told then you've lost your job ... I try not to think about it that much. (Kelly Mullens)

For the small minority who were less happy about FE, the lack of close support and explicit instructions from teachers was one of the problems.

*I'm not happy to work in that system, not really, no, ... 'cos it's too sort of ... **too loose** really. ... I mean, in all lessons you can ask them whatever you want, at any time really, so you could do that – I could do that. But even then I would sort of feel that I shouldn't have **had to be** in a situation where I had to go up to the tutor and say that. (Tom Wyatt)*

A significant number talked of their own ideas being valued in lessons, contrasting this with descriptions of school and implying that FE knowledge was not only, by its nature, more contestable but that tutors were more likely to encourage students' critical engagement. Such responses were more common for arts and social science students than for those studying sciences.

He sets us projects, helps us and goes through with us, asks us how we're doing, suggests ideas ... which is very good. It's not pushy saying, 'You have to do this, you have to do that.' You come in with a suggestion and he says, 'Yeah, that's good!' ... I think that school is a lot of ... teaching you from a proper set thing that everyone needs to know for the exam. Whereas in photography [in FE] ... there is no right or wrong answers. It's just how well you've done. (Matthew Ruck)

You can't get anything wrong in philosophy – everyone's point of view is valid. And you don't just learn off your lecturer, you learn off what other people are saying in the class and stuff like that. So ... it's just ... I've never experienced that before and I think that's brilliant. (Amanda Ball)

Is there a 'right answer' in various subject areas?

*Not in sociology. That's where it's **different**. And that's what's hard at first. To think, 'Well, it's got to be here somewhere...', but it's **not**. You can read the questions and you can look over but basically, at the end, what **matters** is what you **think**.(Melissa Saunders)*

Lorraine Eastment went further, seeing her knowledge expanding and changing in college in ways she did not feel had happened in school.

I think that, at school, you kind of get into a routine. And it's like ... you use the knowledge that you picked up before, and like when we were writing plays and stuff, straight after one another, it's really hard to think of something that's different, because you kept putting

the same things, and so it's like, to a certain extent, your knowledge is really limited. Whereas here [A-level theatre studies], you're picking up new things – you're using ideas that you've already got in your head, and things that you've done before ... so it's a lot different in a way, because you're putting your own input into it, as well as gaining other information and actually building up on that as well, so you're learning all the time.

There was a very small number of more negative views expressed. We have already identified some, like Tom Wyatt, who had been happier with more teacher control and less responsibility. Ishtiaq Khan also missed direct teacher instruction and talked of getting bored between lessons.

You do get bored because sometimes you have just had a lesson like physics, or something, [and] you don't want to get straight on with homework after one and a half hours of physics and you want a break. But when that break comes you don't know what to do and that's when you get bored.

A few other students also found it difficult to cope with free time:

*No, we've got so **much** free time. It's like you don't know what to do, so you're just walking around town. It's not enough time to go home and you don't want to sit there and carry on doing all your work 'cos they say, 'Oh, you should be doing your essays at that point', and although I've got intentions to do that, I never end up doing that [laughs]. I just end up sitting in a cafe somewhere with a couple of friends, just chattering and that ... I miss not having a nine to half past three day. (Lorraine Eastment)*

I didn't expect to have as much free time as I do ... I'm doing three A-levels – that's 15 hours a week, and about the same 'off'. So as soon as I got in today, I had a three and a half hour break! (Sean Keating)

For a few others, difficulties centred on their relationships with their personal tutors.

> *I went back into school on ... a week last Friday, to collect some work. And virtually all the teachers stopped and said, 'Oh, hello Melissa. How are you getting on?' and stuff. But my [FE] tutors just walk past me, y'know?! ... English Language is my key subject, and she's my tutor. ... I* ***don't*** *get on with her. That's basically it. (Melissa Saunders)*

> *Umm, we've had a few problems with him [my personal tutor] so far. Like (laughs) he's not really top on the hygiene list (laughs a bit more). So we've had a ... Well, we've had a moan to other tutors because a lot of my business studies group are doing accounts, and we went to our accountancy tutor who shares the office with him and he agrees with us. (Ben Pallant)*

A number of students had reported very positive experiences of school, and a few of these were critical of their colleges because they didn't live up to prior experiences. For some, college didn't provide the same opportunities for self-expression, self-fulfilment and for forming relationships in the way that they had expected.

> *... but I preferred school really because it was a much smaller environment, and I knew all the teachers, and I'd be able to have a really good relationship with them all. And I knew everybody around me ... And, like, coming to college, it's so much* ***bigger****. And when I first came here I didn't feel like an individual at all. It's like I was just another student and there were, like, thousands of students all around me ... I just didn't like it at all. I'm settling in better now but I still prefer school because it was so much smaller. (Donna Spence)*

Beneath the broad agreement about the positive nature of FE lay an enormous variety of responses about the detail of learning experiences. We identified three linked issues: students' perceptions of the nature of

knowledge; their beliefs about what learning activities were appropriate to them; and their choices of the subjects and courses of which formal FE is constructed.

Students' perceptions of knowledge

Some students appeared to view all knowledge as existing independent of the knower and saw learning as the non-problematic acquisition or absorption of such knowledge.

You say, 'not thinking for yourself'. Does that mean that you go into science and don't think?

Umm, yeah, and you just take down notes and things; it's just learning a new thing every lesson ...

So where does the scientific knowledge come from?

Half from the teacher and the rest from looking at the syllabus, going through the syllabus.

How do you mean?

'Cos the teachers are given the syllabuses to tell them what to teach us and it's got all the things that you need for your exam, all the sentences. (Chris Figgitt)

Fewer students appeared to regard knowledge as some approximation to reality governed by the perceptual framework of the knower and to regard learning as the creation of that knowledge through the knower's interpretation of experience. However, among these students, some such knowledge was highly valued:

Well, like they (the tutors) give you the basis of what you're gonna be doing; they give you the background knowledge and then you

work upon that with your ideas. You know, you can actually see things happening and you can think, 'I did that' or 'I worked out that', 'I found out that'. So it actually feels like you've got somewhere, rather than just sitting there and them telling you what to do. (Lorraine Eastment)

There was also a large number of students who did not fit into either 'camp', who embraced elements of both viewpoints or who changed their views of the nature of knowledge from occasion to occasion or from situation to situation. James Renouf was not alone in viewing 'arts knowledge' and 'scientific knowledge', as essentially 'subjective' and 'objective', respectively, though equally valid.

There were also the modern-day 'Platos' and 'Aristotles', with their contrasting views about the relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge. Some young people held the view that successful practical action is deduced from theoretical knowledge. Such a case was Tom Wyatt who, despite his apparent successes in musical composition at A-level, felt that the fact he had not studied music at GCSE – and hence acquired a theoretical base to his music – had placed him at a distinct disadvantage.

I tend to do it as properly as I can, for instance writing out the musical notation and not just making up any old thing and doing it ... I feel I would have learned more if I could have done GCSE music because it's more sort of genuine really. It's kind of studying the proper aspects of music and not just the 'making it up out of your own mind' kind of thing.

On the other hand, Rosie Tyndall and Luke Stockdale stressed that the practical was an essential prerequisite for an understanding of the theoretical:

I think once you seen – once you've watched the practical side of it – then you get the theory and you understand it more. If it was reversed and you saw the theory first and then you did the practical I think it would be a bit hard to understand the theory ... I think

you do have to see the practical side of it first before you get into it. (Rosie)

I think that you benefit best from things like practicals and watching videos and that. (Luke)

What do you mean by a practical?

Like an experiment like in science, or in cooking where you actually get to cook something. I think you learn more then than just sitting down and listening.

Do you still learn in those non-practical times?

Oh yeah.

Is that the same sort of learning?

Not really because you're not actually getting the chance to do something, y'know. You're just listening to someone telling you what's going to happen and that.

So what's the relationship in cookery, say, between the non-practical learning and the practical work?

You can't really learn from it until you can actually see something – because it's right in front of you, y'know. (Luke)

Others held the view that theory is of little relevance at all to the prac-tical.

What does a practical lesson involve?

Like ... not sitting down studying from books. I think it's gonna be ... like 'hands-on' experience.

Does that make the learning more clear for you?

Yeah – 'cos you can see what you're doing instead of like theoretically ... You know what you're doing.

Is there an element of theory in what you're going to be doing do you think?

... I think it will be practical.

Is there any theory in the practical things that you are doing?

There's no theory to that I don't think. (Edward Manasse)

A few students stressed the essential unity of knowledge and wanted to transcend classificatory boundaries. James Renouf was able to speak confidently in his school interview of the relationships between four of the subjects he was interested in.

With physics, it's like the underlying principle of chemistry, and chemistry is the underlying principle in biology, and biology is ... life. So that's the very basic blocks of all knowledge as I see it.

So how does psychology fit into that?

Well, it's like the other end ... physics is understanding why things work, then psychology is understanding how they work, at the top upper level.

James was building a map of knowledge which enabled him to relate his various experiences in learning. He did not confine his attentions to theoretical or abstracted knowledge, despite the deep fascination this held for him; he was interested in the practical, also.

Well ... we've got a microwave, and I wouldn't want to have one if I didn't know how it worked.

(laughing) Don't you trust it?

It's not that I wouldn't trust it. It's just that I feel a lot better if I know how it works because I feel that I can ... just accept it better.

Why wouldn't taking something like that for granted be acceptable to you?

Well, I suppose that it would make me feel a bit ignorant.

Is that just your own personal values?

Yeah, I think so.

Where do you think that that comes from?

I don't know; it's the complete opposite of my dad – he just has things and lets people who know about it deal with things when he needs something done. And my mum doesn't take much interest in that either.

James was also one of a small number of students who distinguished problematic from non-problematic representations of school knowledge. He said

Well, in school you tend to get taught the things that are known rather than the things that aren't ... You don't get taught in school that people don't know a lot of these things. You get taught almost as if everything can be explained and there isn't much left to know, whereas there is.

Few students suggested the inter-relatedness of all knowledge although Donna Spence was a notable exception:

*School life is **very much** 'my own life' because I'm here so much. ... A lot of the time I stay behind after school to do stuff, but it all links in with my normal life. I mean there are obviously some experiences and some things that you learn from outside of school, but a lot of*

the learning is done here, because it's not just a place to learn academically. I mean, you learn relationships and everything, you know ... You learn about life in general, so it all links together.

While some young people made explicit reference to the intrinsic qualities of knowledge and learning, others such as Michael Dommett, in their descriptions and evaluations of course knowledge, stressed only utilitarian criteria:

If you considered the lessons (in school), which of those have you found the more worthwhile?

I think the most worthwhile is English and maths because you can't get anywhere without that. And technology I find worth it because it's easier to get a job if you've got a good grade and that. If you get a good grade in that then you're gonna be considered a lot more ...

In contrast, others, including Arisa Patel, were prepared to judge knowledge on its intrinsic qualities and the personal satisfaction or enjoyment to be derived from studying it.

I'm studying English lit., maths and art A-levels and I'm doing the subjects I like. ... When we go in to work [in art] it doesn't feel like you are doing any work, but just enjoying it.

Many young people drew upon some combination of these criteria.

Students' perceptions of knowledge were also bound up in their more general experiences of life. Moreover, perceptions could change, either as the result of things that happened in school or college, or as a result of factors stemming from beyond the scope of their formal education. A 'new awareness' could be aroused by such things as new friendship groups, work experience or changes in family circumstances, or made possible through a greater physical independence from family and significant others. Kate Stapley tells her own, untypically dramatic, story.

Earlier you mentioned that you felt that the teacher should be telling you things. Is that where knowledge comes from?

No, I used to think that but I think you've got to go and get it yourself now.

When did you used to think that way?

When I was at school ...

So you think that that transition – moving away from school – has broadened it all out?

Yes. When we were in Australia because it was just my parents, my sister and myself – you can't fall back on anyone because there isn't anyone to fall back on. I learnt an awful lot more about how I should be and how life should be basically. Before I had the opportunity I thought if I'm there then I should be given the knowledge but now I think I've got to go and get it for myself.

How long were you in Australia?

Four months. We were travelling. We bought a camper in Perth and travelled all the way around.

What did you get out of that?

I grew up. And I wasn't so bitter towards teachers and schools 'cos before you couldn't have dragged me into a learning building – I wouldn't have come to college 'cos I thought it was all the same. So I think I've grown up a lot. I've met different people as well – I've met criminals and people that I would never have met before. We worked – we did illegal working while we were out there so we could get some money together and I met all different people. I don't know – it just broadened my idea of life, 'cos before I used to think that everyone just got up, went to work, got home, had a boring life. But I met people who were, like, running away from wives and things – it was quite comical really! I think it made me wake up and

enjoy life and enjoy what I am doing. It made me realise that a lot of people are a lot less fortunate than me.

Kate and others like her afforded direct insight into what we felt was one of the main findings of the study, namely that young people's perceptions of knowledge and learning are continually changing, sometimes for reasons that are to do with factors over which formal education has little or no control. We return to the issue of change in Chapter 4. Next, we examine students' perceptions of learning.

Students' perceptions of learning

Students' views on what constitutes a valuable learning experience were as varied as, and often linked with, their views of knowledge. There was a small number, including Waqas Ali, for whom only receptive learning appeared to have validity:

I prefer it when teachers just tell you the key facts and then you learn it from there on your own. In school, you learn like that in drama. You need to look and to listen to learn best. They are key things. (Waqas Ali)

Chris Figgitt disliked practical work in science (despite having obtained a double A* at GCSE), because he now had to do things for himself.

It's the bit I don't like – the practicals themselves ... at GCSE we used to work in pairs and I always used to just watch and take down the readings – I didn't actually ever set up the apparatus. So it takes a bit of getting used to.

Others, while expressing contentment about receptive learning, did see some virtue in taking a greater personal responsibility:

I don't mind, at the moment, being given stuff – like spoon-fed – but when I leave college, y'know, the last year or so before you go out

there, you think to yourself, 'It would be handy to make the decisions and be able to do that'. (Matthew Ruck)

Others rejected receptive learning, preferring interactive learning activities instead.

I'm looking forward to the extended investigation. You are left on your own a lot more. We get a lot of homework and often it's just, 'Find out about this and write it up' and I find that a bit boring and I like to do the full investigation totally by myself so that I have to go and find things out for myself and this is how I like to do it. At the moment, it's not like that. All the experiments we have been doing, we've been given a sheet and told what to do and I've had to follow the sheets but I prefer to do the experiment myself and then write it all up. (Michael Bradstock)

A few complained about what they saw as poor teaching, such as dictated notes and copying.

It's probably the way that he's teaching. He dictates – it's all we do – we haven't done any actual practical or ... 'off the top of our heads' study ... With dictation, you listen, you write it down, you forget ... well, I do anyway – I find that about that method of teaching ... in business studies, he just dictates. So it goes in, goes out ... (Ben Pallant)

Lorraine Eastment compared her A-level English teaching with A-level psychology:

I'm a bit concerned about English language, because I don't really like the way the lecturer teaches ... She is, like, really boring. ... She gives us all the facts, but that's it – like there's nothing else – and she just hands out worksheets. And we've got to read through books and make notes on the books and copy out pages and pages of books ... In psychology – our lecturer's really good. She really gets into the lessons, and she uses her own experiences to explain stuff,

and she'll get us to discuss things in the class, and it just makes it more interesting.

Students' dispositions to knowledge and to learning were often found to be linked. Tamsin Rooke indicates how, as a school pupil, she accepted, apparently uncritically, classroom knowledge as objective, immutable fact, a passive, receptive approach to learning and the absolute authority of her teacher. Following her transition into FE, her views of knowledge, learning and teaching changed. She was not alone in declaring that FE had brought her to a new understanding of the nature and origins of knowledge and a new preference for interactive learning activities.

In school I remember this teacher told us something ... and I thought that it was true and I didn't realise that it was his opinion. And I went home and my Mum said, 'No, no, no, that's not true' ... I thought, 'no way; it's got to be true – he's the teacher.' ... But now, the lecturers are like, 'Here it is. Now you think about it – I'm not gonna say, "do this, do that" because you won't learn.' So I think that the way that we learn now is much better because you're learning for yourselves. And if we discuss it, we learn other people's opinions – how they learn it.

So before, knowledge was something that came from the teacher. Where is that appearing from now in your lectures?

Me! [laughing] Because you have a little guidance but you're not getting pushed into it. I'm soaking it up now, rather than at school [where] it just went over your head or in your book and you just looked it up at the end of the year to revise from. Now I'm actually learning it and I'm seeing it in everyday life ... When you can actually see it as well, and you're in control of your education ...

Students reported being taught and expected to learn in a wide variety of ways. Most learning activities appeared to lie somewhere on a rough spectrum from 'receptive' to 'interactive'.[6] Apart from class 'discussions', we were told of relatively few examples of imaginative group activity or of

student-centred negotiation which might be described as 'interactive learning activities'. We looked for patterns of learning activity and opportunity, by subject, by course or by institution and it was apparent that the large FE and tertiary colleges each contained a wide variety of approaches to teaching and learning. However, the smaller sixth form college appeared to have less variety of approaches than the other two and the extremes of 'receptive' and 'interactive learning activity' were almost unknown there, at least in the experiences of our small sample. Students' reports of teaching strategies employed in the sixth form college appeared to coalesce, across all subjects and courses, towards the centre of the rough spectrum described above.

There was one further unifying factor concerning the sixth form college. Many of the students we interviewed there described the ways in which the library, which was very well equipped, acted as a focal point for work in 'free' time and for gathering information for assignments and essays. Charlotte Stickings said:

> *You just tend to follow the older students and what they do. I would never have thought of going to the library and working. I would have been expecting to be doing it at home. But you see everybody else going to the library and it just comes natural and you just go in. there and work. It's quiet in there and if you need any information it's just there for you, and the computers are there.*

Across all three institutions, we detected differences between teaching and learning in subjects like science or engineering and in the creative arts. The former was more likely to be tightly teacher controlled and indivi-dualist, though we would not want to overstate this. In the latter, discussion, the sharing of opinions and a sense of working together were rather more common.

Despite many current assumptions to the contrary, we were able to detect few differences between the learning activities of students on GNVQ courses and those studying for A-levels.[7] One notable exception was that GNVQ students, at least in subjects like business and administration, were

more likely than A-level students to spend time outside the classroom collecting factual information. Charlotte Stickings described her Advanced GNVQ business and administration work as follows:

> *What they do is give you a lot of assignments and tell you what you need to do and then you can go off, go out of college and find out things, 'phone up your places, work in the library, do it as you want to do it. But you have to make sure that you do it and get it done. ... I prefer to work in groups although you find people who want to copy your work and that's what is making me want to work on my own now. ... The teachers give you sheets and talk about the basic things that you need to know ... and you can go and look things up in the library and in business books. ... I have gone beyond the library but I don't think there is any need to. I've written off and got information. ... I'm definitely more aware of newspapers now and I read the business parts because it's interesting. ... On Tuesday, it will be role play with a French person coming into the class. I've had to 'phone France to get the information. I've 'phoned twice – the second time because we needed to film somebody and he said, on the 'phone, that my speech was good and he wanted to film me. So I'm being filmed doing it as well.*

Activities such as those described here by Charlotte do not necessarily represent fully interactive, or student-centred, learning activities. Charlotte makes reference to her tutors telling her what she needs to do and talking about 'the basic things you need to know'. It was not uncommon for us to find, particularly under the GNVQ umbrella, cases of highly prescribed activities offering, in practice, very little scope for students to exercise choice over matters concerning the sources of their knowledge or the methods of their own learning.

Despite the rhetoric which frequently accompanies it,we found that GNVQ was no more likely to entail 'interactive' or 'student-centred' learning activities than A-level. Jonathan Millett, for instance, describes his Advanced GNVQ building and construction course thus:

He's always at the board. We sometimes have sheets, figures, books...

And does it tend to be that the lecturer is talking to the whole group at once?

Sometimes it is. I don't really like that idea. I'd rather ... I don't like it when the lecturer talks to the whole group and everyone has to shut up.

What would you prefer?

Just to have the sheets handed out and it was more of a class discussion. I think that way you'd get more into it.

How would you get more into it?

I just think that you would understand it more. If other people don't understand it in the class, it gets you more ... it makes you contribute more. So if you're talking about something, you need to understand it more.

Kevin Vokes was doing a Foundation GNVQ course in automotive engineering. For him, learning activities were also distinctly 'receptive' and included avoiding those who 'mucked around'.

How do you find it managing your time and motivating yourself?

It's easy, apart from the idiots in the class mucking around.

How do you deal with them mucking around?

Get me head down and get on with my work ...

How do you learn in the automobile side?

We do a lot of theory in the books. He runs through that every day and then in the workshop he runs through on the board how to do it and then he'll come over if you get any problems ...

Are you let loose on cars at the moment?

Yes, not like taking engines apart – we do that on a stand (with) an engine that don't work. And then we've got normal cars – I've done like the brakes on cars and I took the radiator out and alternator ...

When they're going through the theory is it just out of a book?

Yeah, and we'll copy it off the board, write it down into our books which we then revise out of.

Is there time to ask questions and discuss things?

He says at the end, 'Are there any questions?'.

As we have seen with Charlotte Stickings, other GNVQ teaching was more imaginative than this. Nevertheless, Jonathan and Kevin were not unique.

As with their views of knowledge, young people's views of college learning activities owed much to their earlier experiences of learning. Prior successes and failures in learning counted significantly towards their judgments of the value of the various learning opportunities before them. As was discovered in the Leverhulme study, preferences for receptive learning activities were found more often among students of science and mathematics than among others. It is difficult to generalise beyond that, however, since preferences for learning activities were not found to be associated with gender, with level of attainment or with any particular social or cultural background, in our admittedly small and unrepresentative sample.

Students' perceptions of the nature of knowledge and of learning activities were intimately bound up with each other, and also with their perceptions of the structures within which knowledge and learning activities are pre-

sented in FE. For example, Ryan Holloway described his attitude to biology in ways that encompassed his preferred learning activities, his perceptions of knowledge and his ranking of biology as being of least interest and importance amongst his A-level subjects. In his first interview, he described choosing biology because, 'I like it, I enjoy it, I find it comes naturally, sort of easy to me and I needed another A-level!' In his second interview, he talks of biology thus:

> *In biology, it's very different to school 'cos it's one of those things where intellectual people go and learn! And she just says, 'we're going to do this on glucose polymers' and she says something and you're supposed to understand it instead of her explaining why things happen. So in that respect it's a change of thinking – well I think it is – and I still have to ask a lot of questions when I don't understand things. So I ask the questions until I get it straight in my mind ... She gives us half-page notes on protein structures and so we write it down and then she expects us to go away and write a two page note on it from our books and I just don't have the time. I know that it sounds really slack of me but it's not my important subject – it's that I class art and music as my important ones and biology is just my third subject. So I think, 'well'. 'Cos my reality changes and I get a bit bored of music so art then becomes the important one. I think that I fluctuate between the academic and the creative and somewhere in the middle comes music. Sometimes biology comes out on top – but not for long though. It's when I'm sitting down and I think, 'I can't draw and I can't play the saxophone – so at least I'm going to get my biology.'*

We turn next to the choices our subjects made within and between those formal structures: subjects, courses and institutions.

Choices within the formal structures of learning

The end of Year 11 in schools brought a forced consideration of what our interviewees wanted to do in the future. They faced two immediate choices – to leave or stay on in full-time education and, if the latter, where to stay on and what course and subject(s) to take. The choices that were made and the reasons why they were made were intimately bound up with their perceptions of learning in FE, for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. For most, perceptions of learning opportunities, subjects and courses were permeated by issues of enjoyment and value.

> *It was a difficult choice really ... between the BTEC at West Ottley College, or the GNVQ at [our sample tertiary college]. And the GNVQ was a lot of theory work ... whereas BTEC was a lot of practical work. So, I'm a practical sort of person, as I explained before, and that was what really sort of swayed me to West Ottley – although there was some 'music industry' involved in the GNVQ, which did interest me. But it was basically just the practical work. (David Jamieson)*

Daniel Johnson thought school education should do more to prepare for these choices.

> *I think that in schools we ought to get more tastes of the sorts of things that you can go on to do at college because we certainly haven't had anything to do with psychology at school and I think that there's a lot of courses that we should be given small tasters in. I think that is what school should be really: it should be divided into two halves – the first half being where you get a sort of splattering of everything and then you choose the things that you really like and go on to in more detail and then you can go on to do in college courses.*

He went on to say, in the second interview, 'you can't learn something unless you're interested in it'. For others, a sense of enjoyment was often linked with prior or anticipated success in this or a related area of study. Melissa Saunders said:

I think I decided [on the basis of] what I would be good at ... and which you enjoy. I think it's really important that you go and do that [which] you enjoy, because if not, you're going to have no 'go' about doing them.

For another group, interest came mainly from the opportunities that success on a particular course was perceived to facilitate. Charlotte Stickings chose to study for the Advanced GNVQ in business and administration because she wanted a career in business. But she said, 'I didn't like business in school and I was wondering whether I would like it here but because of the teachers I am really enjoying the course'.

While most students were able to articulate some form of partly rational reasoning for their choices, this was not always so. Tamsin Rooke, when describing her selection of four GCSE subjects to be part of her pre-nursing course, reveals a relatively rare and unsystematic approach.

Well, we were all sitting there the day that we had to choose what we wanted to do and so we were in this room and I said, 'I'm going to have to do English. What else am I going to do?' And I was with my friend and she said, 'psychology's meant to be good, y'know'. And she was, 'sociology seems a bit like it', and I said, 'well, I have to do maths as well'. And we had the four! And it was like that and my friend says, 'Oh, well I need another one. What are you two doing?' So we told her and she said, 'Oh, I'll have that one as well.' It was just like that, but I'm glad I did them now though. And also, psychology and sociology sound so grown up (laughing). You can say, 'I'm doing psychology'.

In their last term of compulsory schooling, almost all the students had decided what they wanted to do in the following year, dependent, in many cases, on eventual success in the GCSE examinations. We interviewed them again, six months later, half a term into their FE. Perhaps the most surprising finding of the whole study was that only 45% of the 69 young people we were able to track were doing what they had originally chosen in Year 11. A further 5% who had been undecided when first interviewed, had eventually selected one of the options they had originally been consid-

ering. The changes were of varying types and significance. Nine of our A-level sample (13%) had changed one or more of the subjects they were studying. Two people (3%) doing Advanced GNVQs had decided against their earlier intention of also taking an A-level. Two young people (3%) changed their GCSE subjects. We found that 18% were following an entirely different course from that which they had originally chosen, including two students who were taking a lower level of GNVQ than they had hoped. Five students (7%) had changed institution, and nine (13%), that we know of, had decided not to continue into FE at all. Because the focus of our study was on learning experiences within our three sample colleges, only one of this last group was followed up in the second phase of interviewing: Gary Cowgill.

There were many reasons for these changes. Many, it transpired, had been *forced* by college requirements. Often, changes occurred because of disappointing examination results. Young people who had been hoping to study A-level found themselves either on a vocational course such as an Intermediate GNVQ or, especially at the tertiary college, doing GCSE resits. Others, hoping to study for an Advanced GNVQ, dropped to Intermediate or from Intermediate to Foundation courses. Some A-level students dropped from four subjects to three. The other main reason for forced changes was that the desired A-level subject combinations could not be fitted into the college timetable.

The impact of these forced changes varied from person to person, depending upon how unexpected the change was and upon how serious it was perceived to be. In general, changes to an A-level subject and the dropping from four to three subjects were greeted with expressions of mild regret, and sometimes with the intention of picking them up again the following year. Forced changes of course were often more traumatic. Students were conscious of having failed, in several cases by only one or two grades. There was a perceived loss of status, a feeling of having lost a year and, in a few cases, feelings that their career plans had been demolished overnight. A particular case was Fazarna Moosa. At the time of our second interview, she was following an Intermediate GNVQ course in Information Technology (IT) that she did not want to study and felt that her ambitions to go to university had been shattered. Fazarna had a strong sense of

injustice because her GCSE in Spanish was eventually remarked from a D to a C. If she had been awarded the C originally, she would have been eligible to start the A-level course she wanted. By the time the revised grade had been awarded, it was too late. She said:

> *I'm not sure what I want to do [next year] any more. A-levels – I thought about them but obviously the grades I got are not good and I was thinking, 'with those grades, am I going to be good enough to do A-levels?' None of the GNVQ courses interest me. I can go on to GNVQ Advanced now, because I've got four grade Cs. There is a place guaranteed for me so I could transfer now but there is no room in it – no room whatsoever. And it's too late, they've started doing the assignments and so I've missed out all ways ... I don't know what I'm going to do.*

Fazarna was not the only one who felt hurt by being forced to 'change down'. For many in this position, there was little sense that they had chosen their eventual course at all. When asked why she was studying for the Foundation GNVQ in business, Kirsty Spiers said, 'this is the only course that you can get if you didn't get very good GCSEs'. However, some students were hopeful that a gradual progression through levels of GNVQ would allow them to 'get back on track' and enter university eventually. Luke Stockdale did not get good enough grades to begin the Intermediate GNVQ that he had originally chosen. Instead, he began a Foundation course, intending to follow that with Intermediate and Advanced levels. He anticipated spending four years in full-time FE. However, we later discovered that he had dropped out of college, giving up those ambitions. When we last spoke to him, in July 1996, he was unemployed and making regular trips to the careers office. He was considering some form of work-based training.

Other changes between summer intentions and autumn enrolments were *self-induced*. Arisa Patel changed from considering A-levels in media studies, geography and English literature to English literature, art and maths.

I decided to do English literature because I wanted to do that. But I'd rather do art than media studies because I got a C which is OK for art; but I really enjoyed it and I saw it more as a hobby than an actual subject. And I knew I would regret it if I didn't do it. So I picked art and I picked maths to go with it and I'm happy with my choice now.

She placed enjoyment ahead of previous achievement and career relevance, at least as far as art was concerned. For other students, the changed decision reflected sometimes quite radical changes in career intention. We will return to this later.

A few were not conscious of having changed their minds, despite differences between what they said to us in the two interviews. For others, including many of those forced by timetable blocks to reconsider, the changed choices appeared to be whimsical and not thought through. One reason for this was the pressure of time. Students turned up on the college enrolment day, or possibly a prior day set aside for consultation, and had to make rapid decisions about what they were going to do. Popular courses filled up quickly, and those wishing or needing to change often had to move fast to get places before they disappeared. Sometimes courses were signed up for simply because they still had spaces.

There was another, much smaller, group of young people where change was linked to a reassertion of intentions that had, at one point been considered to be over-optimistic. For example, both Arisa Patel and Abdul Mushtaq wanted to study A-levels. However, both did less well than expected in their mock examinations and, as a result, had been offered places on Advanced GNVQ courses. However both got better GCSE results than they or the college had been expecting. They then abandoned any notion of GNVQ, happily settling for the A-levels they had always really wanted. This process was reinforced, in Arisa's case, because the GNVQ in media studies had been cancelled. She said:

I had already enrolled for GNVQ in media and they didn't have the course any more. Now I've got the grades, I don't think I would have done it [anyway]. I think I would rather have done A-levels.

Chapter 3

Dispositions to learning, studentship and occupations

Dispositions to learning

The accounts in the previous chapter demonstrate that young people's perceptions of learning are shot through with issues of preference and value. One way of describing these is in terms of *dispositions* to learning. In using the term 'disposition', we are drawing upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu who argues that each of us acts in ways which are made possible by our existing dispositions to the world. Such dispositions are combined as *habitus*, which he describes as

> *... the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations ... a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 18).*

It is 'that system of dispositions which acts as a mediation between structures and practice' (Bourdieu 1977, p. 487). Habitus derives from and is part of the whole person, including the body. Habitus, and the dispositions

of which it is made up, evolves through the life history of the person and is strongly influenced by the culture within which it is located.

Much of the life of any young person takes place outside the confines of school or college and is far removed from the focus of formal learning. Yet those other aspects of a person's life interpenetrate their dispositions to knowledge and learning, their experiences of learning, and the ways in which others view them as learners as well as people. We lacked the resources to investigate fully these wider issues of identity and experience. Nevertheless, our interviews were structured to encourage young people to talk to us about those aspects of their more general lives and interests which they perceived as relevant to their learning in school or college.

Young people's dispositions to learning are part of a complex nexus in which habitus, personal identity, life history, social and cultural contexts, actions and learning are inter-related. We shall return to this point in the discussion of learning careers in the next chapter.

From our study, we found that young people's dispositions appeared to be particularly closely related to:

- their perceptions of the nature of the knowledge and their assessments of the value which that knowledge held for them personally
- their views of the purposes of learning in a given context
- their evaluations of a learning activity as a means of acquiring the knowledge as they perceived it; as a means of providing personal rewards to be gained through learning and with reference to their perceptions of their own capabilities, based on prior experiences of learning.

Students' accounts of themselves in relation to learning reveal some diversity of dispositions.

> *I've lost some of my motivation and I just start to question* ***why*** *I'm doing things ... Sometimes I just think, 'Oh, y'know, it's to get further on – to get a good career and everything'. And other times I just think, 'Y'know, what is the point? Does a good career really matter in life? Does it?* ***Why*** *should you have to do that?' And I*

start to question ... why, why are people motivated like that? ... And then, sometimes, you just carry on with it and think, 'Oh well ... it's only two years!' [laughs]. (Donna Spence)

I think being alive is all about taking in as much as you can and trying to make some sense of everything, and trying to play around and get some order. So I think that you should take influence from everything, good or bad. You should look at something and you should try and take something from it ... I don't think that you can ever stop learning. Or you shouldn't, y'know? (Daniel Johnson)

I like art and English and science. I just don't really like maths. I don't know why any more, I just used to love maths ... You can't express yourself – there's an answer. It's like English is more express yourself, and art nobody can tell you what to do, but with maths you've got to know how to work out everything properly. You've got to come to one answer (Cara Livesey).

Students' dispositions to knowledge and learning are susceptible to change from context to context and from time to time. While they may fluctuate from moment to moment (such as might happen following a teacher's praise or disapproval) they are relatively stable in the short term. In the longer term they may change, often though not always gradually, and the young people we interviewed were sometimes able to provide insights into the different types of conditions under which their dispositions to learning had undergone change during their secondary school years. Common examples of such change arose where students came to perceive a new relevance of their studies to their personal or occupational aspirations, where they came to recognise intrinsic rewards attached to certain learning activities or to discover a moral basis for some body of knowledge or learning activity; and where teacher praise for work in a course of study, where previously there had been little success, had prompted them to reappraise themselves as learners. Similarly, there were cases of students who came to perceive less relevance in their studies, who came to devalue the intrinsic

rewards of study, who discovered that aspects of course knowledge were not consistent with certain moral principles or who had experienced teacher disapproval.

As we followed them from school into FE, we were able to illuminate the complexity of some of the relationships between students' learning dispositions and their wider experiences, which were integrated through the development of their habitus. One particular focus was the relationship between their choices of FE provision and their perceptions of occupational career development. It is to this we turn next.

Course and subject choices and career intentions

The fact that all of our young people had just reached the end of compulsory schooling forced them to consider what to do next. It was inevitable that considerations of learning and of the courses, subjects and institutions which would package that learning, would also entail some consideration of an eventual career. However, the relationship between career intentions and learning intentions differed widely from person to person.

A small minority expressed strongly-held and specifically-focused career intentions and had chosen subjects and courses which they perceived as facilitating progression towards such careers. Ben Pallant, for instance, intended to be an accountant. Through personal contacts, he had identified the A-level subjects he felt would be most relevant to that career. He said:

> *I want to be an accountant and my mum knows the business and finance person down at the Bristol and West Building Society, so she asked him what sort of things I need to go into that sort of work.*

He chose A-level accountancy, business studies and politics. He, and many of the other students who made these sorts of choice, had a predominantly instrumental view of learning and education. They were disposed to do whatever was required to achieve the ends they had adopted.

A few were torn between alternative careers. Amanda Ball, when in school, said,

> *I wanted to do English literature and theatre studies because ... I wouldn't mind going into acting – like going on to acting school – and that'd help you out. Psychology, just because when I went to the college I thought it sounded interesting. And history because if it doesn't work out with acting, I wouldn't mind being an archaeologist ... They're just things I've liked since I was really small. Like drama: everyone likes getting up and showing off, don't they? And archaeology: I used to watch all these little programmes on telly ... and I've just liked it since then.*

Amanda's case illustrates something which she shared with several others in our sample: career intentions which were based on dreams and imaginings rather than thoroughly thought-out possibilities. By the second interview, archaeology had disappeared.

> *I decided that I didn't want to be an archaeologist any more so I'm not taking history.*

What made up your mind not to want to be that any more?

> *I don't know – I just decided. That was probably just a phase and everybody goes through phases. ... And that was my phase, I suppose – wanting to be an archaeologist – 'cos there was loads of stuff on telly at the time and I thought, 'Oh, that's really brilliant'. And then I decided that I didn't want to do it any more.*

We were intrigued by this group, for previous work by Hodkinson et al (1996) on the career decisions of young people leaving school to enter Youth Training had discovered a greater incidence of realism. Yet Amanda was not alone and it was not uncommon for young people to make the type of decision which we chose to categorise as 'whimsical dreams'. The name is intended to signify two key components of such decisions. Firstly, they appeared to be whimsical in the sense that they reflected fairly insub-

stantial parts of a person's identity. By this we mean that the intention could be and often was dropped with no apparent sense of loss or personal change.

The second component is a strong 'dreaming' romanticism: that is, the ambition to do something seen as glamorous or attractive in some way, but which was probably unattainable or unrealistic. Amanda had seen archaeology television programmes and liked the idea of being involved. Her desire to act was a more common form of teenage romanticism, similar to desires to be a top sports person. However, the boundaries of romanticism are permeable and imprecise. Amanda was a gifted amateur actress, getting very positive reviews for starring roles in several local productions. She knew what it felt like to act, and many successful professional actors must have had similar beginnings. What makes her acting ambition a whimsical dream, though, is that it was also gradually abandoned, as she herself began to see it as unrealistic.

For others who succeeded in turning romantic dreams into actual careers, we would hypothesise two differences from Amanda and other whimsical dreamers. Firstly, their dreams were and remained a substantial part of their identity and were not abandoned easily. Secondly, either gradually, or as a result of a sudden opportunity, what was romantic became realistic.

In the Youth Training study, Hodkinson found some examples of whimsicality but much more realism. A plausible reason for this difference is the transitional nature of FE in Britain. Choosing a training place as a garage mechanic is a concrete commitment to a career, even if only for a time. Choosing an FE course leads to other opportunities to make decisions as the chosen course nears completion and whimsy is less likely to be challenged by hard realities. The whimsical and idealistic nature of some career choices is one of the reasons why so many young people's original course and subject choices are insubstantial.

Daniel Johnson faced a different career dilemma. His passion for music seemed more than a romantic whim:

> *Music ... is ... the major focal point of my life. That's what I live for. But, as with everything else, my focus in what I'm appreciating in*

music has changed. Because now, instead of having bands that wouldn't succeed because no one's interested in what I'm playing ... Now I've begun to appreciate other types of music that people do appreciate as well. I've got a new band.

Within the informal music world, Daniel was making appropriate career moves which did not entail formal education. However, he was realistic about his chances of eventual success. He saw FE and university as an important backup to his musical ambitions. His subject choices reflected a disposition to learning that was centred upon interest and enjoyment. However, he was one of those whose original hopes were dashed by college option structures.

I couldn't do psychology because it was in the wrong column; and I wanted to do philosophy and it was in the wrong column; and then I thought 'politics' and it was in the wrong column; and in the end, I just had to put up with sociology ... sociology doesn't seem to really interest me or excite me in any way and I heard other people talk about the psychology course and the philosophy course, especially philosophy, and they've been saying how good it is, and I think ... how, ideally, I'd love to do philosophy.

A larger group approached their transitions into FE in a very different way. They wanted courses and subjects which would 'keep their options open'. Nadine Sturman came around to this view after worrying that she should have had a clear career objective, yet did not. She said:

I'm feeling more relaxed now but earlier on I felt I had to have a career plan because all these people around you say, 'I'm gonna do that; that's always what I wanted to do ...' And they knew exactly what they were doing and I sort of stood around and thought, 'well, I don't!' ... I went to my dad and said how I felt, and he said that it's better to keep your options open. And it didn't make much sense at first but after he spoke to me it made a lot of sense.

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A further group had no career intentions except in the most general sense. They appeared to see education as something to be planned, 'one step at a time'.

> *I'm learning new things. It's not as if I already know things and it's [my A-level course] doing what I want to do. The results I get from this course, I want to use to get into university and then from university I want to get a degree to get a job. (Scott Everson)*

This view was most common among A-level students. A-level courses appeared to leave career options more open and their lack of explicit vocational focus allowed them to be considered independently of a specific career. Because the qualification is relatively new, we cannot say whether Advanced GNVQ will prove to restrict opportunities for future careers more than A-levels or not, but it is certainly perceived to do so. To choose a vocational course in health and social care is seen to imply an eventual career in that area, while selecting A-level law is not seen as necessarily implying a legal career. Furthermore, those who were choosing A-levels intending to go to university would have two further occasions to relate educational choices to eventual careers – as they considered their university choices and towards the end of their degree programmes. Samantha Grimsey said:

> *I'd like to go to university but I don't know what to do. I'll need more information. ... I've got no ideas on careers. I haven't got a clue. I'm very positive but I'm keeping my options open. ... There's no pressure at the moment because there's at least two years before you need to think further.*

Ross Glover, in his second interview, wanted to prolong his life as a student. Far from being a direct preparation for an adult career, FE and eventually university were seen as a desirable escape. He had decided upon this as a result of his FE studies, especially A-level sociology. His earlier whimsical dream of working in journalism seemed to have gone. He said:

The only thing that I've really thought about is that I want to be a student for as long as possible – and that's it really. I haven't really thought about settling down or anything. It's just that it's more relaxed; it's like you haven't quite reached the outside world yet. So I've got the confines, sort of like a safe area ... I'm just happy and relaxed and that.

For some, dispositions to learning and post-16 choice were tied up with issues of educational status. There were two main manifestations: courses and institutions. A few students talked explicitly of GNVQ being of lower status than A-level. For rather more, indications of status differences between GNVQ and A-level were subtle and implicit. For instance, very few of those studying A-levels had considered GNVQ at all, and those, like Arisa Patel, who had, did not really take it seriously. Scott Everson and Abdul Mushtaq changed from GNVQ to A-level because their GCSE results had been better than they expected. Abdul said:

My letter when I got here was for GNVQ but I went to reception and said I wanted to enrol for As because my grades were better than expected. They discussed it but I was quite positive and they put me in with the A-level programme.

However, Charlotte Stickings chose the Advanced GNVQ to help get a job in business. Even though both her predicted GCSE grades and her actual results were good, she never seriously considered A-levels.

Some who, like Fazarna Moosa, had been forced by results to take an Intermediate or Foundation GNVQ course, had come to believe that A-levels might now be beyond them. Others who had failed to achieve the grades to begin A-levels were more likely to resit GCSEs in the hope that they could stay on track, rather than to move to a lower level of GNVQ.

Issues of status between institutions were clearest in connection with the sixth form college. All those who entered this college could have enrolled at the local FE college, yet none of our sample regarded this as a serious option. When she discovered that she had not done sufficiently well in her

GCSEs to begin her A-levels at the sixth from college, Fazarna Moosa was advised to apply to the FE college, where entry requirements were less strict. She said:

> *I didn't get the grades I wanted. So they said, 'try [the] FE college because they will put you onto A-levels there with the grades you got'. I took an exam [there] because I had only got three grade Cs, and I took an exam for two hours, passed that and they said that I could do A-levels. So then I went in for a day but didn't like it at all, not as good as here. ... It wasn't the ... sort of working environment I wanted to be in. The teachers were OK but I just walked out. The only course I could do here was this one [Intermediate GNVQ in IT]. I asked if I could do GCSE retake, but it was full. The only one ... is what I am doing now. It's not what I expected, but it's all right.*

What Fazarna wanted to do was study A-levels at the sixth form college. She placed the choice of institution above the choice of course. Waqas Ali was also impressed by the sixth form college. He said, 'It's [Intermediate GNVQ] not what I expected because I expected it would be lower than this, but by coming here it's more like upper class to me. Compared with school, it's more upper class'. When we probed what he meant by this, Waqas praised the quality of the college resources. We cannot be sure, but one plausible explanation of his remark is that the sixth form college was a high status institution with the sorts of resources that he felt 'upper class' people would expect and receive. GNVQ might be lower status (lower class) than A-level, but the college as a whole had high status so that he was very happy to be there. Such an interpretation is consistent with the rejection of the FE college as an option by several sixth form college students, including Fazarna. Michael Bradstock said, 'I thought about FE but decided against it. I'd been told it was a bit old. I went to the sixth form college open evening. I got accepted. I didn't think about anywhere else after that.' One of our original sample chose not to progress to the sixth form college. She got A grades in all her GCSEs and decided to study for A-levels at a highly regarded opted-out grammar school several miles away. We do not know why, but perhaps she regarded this school as being of even higher status than the sixth form college.

The nature of institutional choice was different for each of the colleges we sampled. Whereas the sixth form college was seen as the natural high status choice, the tertiary college was seen as the only possible choice by most of the students we interviewed. They were very happy to go there and few showed any desire to consider anywhere else. The FE college, on the other hand, was surrounded by schools with well established sixth forms and by others developing their own sixth forms. The students there had all made definite choices to go into FE rather than to stay on in school. Several reported pressure to stay in the school sixth form. Sarah Whiting said:

> *They really wanted us to stay on at school. ... They're always telling us the results about the school and everything and giving out these leaflets and that. ... I thought I wasn't going to stay on then [when she started secondary school] but I know that I'm definitely not now. I'm not all that keen on school really. ... I've had to choose between the college and the sixth form and I thought, 'definitely college'.*

The dispositions to learning of young people entering FE frequently entailed views about occupational careers and the relevance which course knowledge and learning had to them. We have seen that these dispositions were affected, and sometimes altered, by the experiences which students gained once they had entered college, an issue which we will return to in the next chapter. However, before doing that, we need to consider briefly what the students told us about the ways in which they reacted to the educational opportunities presented by FE.

Studentship

The term studentship signals the fact that students themselves were active in constructing their learning, partly in response to what the colleges were offering. Elsewhere (Avis et al, 1996), Bloomer has described studentship as:

> *... the variety of ways in which students exert influence over the curriculum in the creation and confirmation of their own personal learning careers ... Although passage through post-16 education for*

some students is marked by a relatively uncritical compliance to the requirements imposed upon them by their syllabuses and their teachers, most become distinguished in some way by a personal, critical and creative response to those requirements and expectations: they ***act upon*** *the learning opportunities offered to them by* ***making*** *their own curriculum. It is this 'making through action' which we have chosen to describe as* ***studentship*** *(pp 140-141).*

By the time of the second interviews, we were tentatively able to identify four different forms of emergent studentship displayed by students. These were conformism, retreatism, innovation and strategic compliance.[8]

Many students displayed a *conforming* studentship. That is, they accepted, or came to accept, often enthusiastically but largely without question, the aims, objects and methods of the learning opportunities which their tutors prescribed for them.

Retreatism occurred when students began to reject the aims, objects or methods of learning that their tutors prescribed but did not have a commitment to any alternative aims, objects or methods. It was often linked to a transformation in dispositions to learning. There are many reasons why students can become alienated from learning in this way (Bloomer, 1997). Students' commitments to career objectives may weaken over time, other conflicting interests may come to preoccupy them, or they may tire of the learning activities entailed in the course. Retreatists are recognisable as having become progressively disconnected from earlier hopes and enthusiasms but not having substituted any alternative learning aspirations.

Melissa Saunders was one of a small number of students to give an indication that they were revising their decisions to pursue a chosen subject beyond their present course. While she was not planning an instant retreat from her learning, she seemed to be undertaking a longer-term gradual withdrawal. This withdrawal appeared to be directly influenced by the teaching she was experiencing. Her first choice subject had always been English and her original intention was to complete her GCSE resits and move on to study English at A-level and in higher education.

*That's perhaps why I want to get out of the English department as well ... because I think there are some ... **not** particularly wonderful or pleasant people floating around trying to teach English. Which, perhaps when ... my personal tutor – Queen Asdan, as I've now crowned her – she just doesn't concentrate on the English language enough, for me. Because that's what I'm there for.*

In Melissa's case, the qualities she attributed to her tutor were the reasons for her intention to abandon the study of English beyond GCSE level – a decision which she later confirmed had been followed through.

Innovatory responses to learning opportunities are where students maintain a commitment to the given aims and objects of their courses but pursue alternative means of achieving them. It takes time for innovations to develop (see Chapter 4) and it is not surprising that examples were rare in this study. However, John Blackshaw had made alternative arrangements for his own learning. He alluded to the cool relationship he had with his GCSE music teacher and to the more productive working relationship he had with his peripatetic piano teacher whom he used as the principal support for his musical education:

She [the music teacher] has left me alone 'cos I never really got on with her a lot – so she leaves me to get on with a lot of the stuff. But when we've got tape work and that – when she's going to be there – she doesn't speak to me a lot but she tells me if I've got a problem to see her. But she doesn't see me if you know what I mean. ...

I do a lot of it with my piano teacher on Saturdays 'cos he's brilliant. He knows what he's on about and knows all about the course already 'cos he lectures down at [another FE college] about piano and all sorts of other music. I do all my theory work with him so I already know a lot about theory up to grade 5 and 6 and that's what the GCSE level is so I'm OK about that.

Such innovatory strategies often break any causal connection between the educational provision in college and the eventual achievements of the student. This is one reason why current fashion to measure college suc-

cesses by the outcomes of their students is misguided. We do not know how well John will do in his music examinations but it is possible that any success could be attributed to his relationships with a piano teacher who actually teaches at a 'rival' college!

Another prospective innovator was Simon Corrigan. He was interested in a career in journalism, and tried to join the team producing the college magazine. However, he had not fitted in very well and was considering setting up a rival publication. He said:

> *I had a bit of a disagreement with the people on the magazine. We are on the best of terms, but I'm starting my own now. I've taken the initiative. They did advertise early on that they wanted people to work on it but we had different ideas so we went our separate ways. We've got some people together. We've looked into it and it's just a matter of getting permission to start it – and we should find out in a day or so.*

There is some evidence that *strategic compliance* is probably the commonest of all student responses to formal education (Bloomer, 1997; Brause, 1992; Brown, 1987). Effectively, young people decide to 'do what they are told' but with little enthusiasm and regardless of whether or not they consider it just or worthwhile. Such students become accepting, passive members of a class. Brause, writing of schools in the USA, talks of such people 'enduring' education.

In this study, there were more obvious cases of strategic compliance among our students than of retreatism and innovation. Melanie West briefly describes how she submitted unquestioningly to something which appears to have had no meaning for her:

> *We haven't really been told why we're doing that. We've just been told, 'Here's your work placement. Go there every Friday.' I mean, I didn't even know I had a work placement every week. I thought it would be a block.*

Do you consider that to be learning?

No.

What is it then?

(laughs) I don't know really. I just go.

Amanda Ball, who could be assertive, is another who declared her contentment to do as she was told:

Who's to say that they're right and you're wrong?

(laughing) My tutor! My tutor – you'll have to ask my tutor. I don't know ... I don't argue – I just say, 'Oh, all right' and go and do it again. I don't tend to ask ... I'm not particularly interested in English literature and so when they tell me that what I've done isn't up to standard then I ... I don't question it. I just go and do it again. I just get it out the way.

And even Kate Stapley admitted to playing the 'examiner game' in her GCSE sociology and to suppressing some strongly held views:

If the teacher says this and writes it down then that's what I've got to write down in the exam, whether or not I think it's right or wrong because I can't really put my views down and expect the examiner to go, 'Oh, yes, I see her point of view'. But, I mean, there are views in sociology that I thought crap! ... You don't have any freedom. 'Cos if you get it wrong, you don't get any points for getting it wrong do you? That's the way I see it. But I've never had the view that if I'm told this then it must be right. I've always thought that's what they think.

There are close links between the forms of studentship adopted by young people, their dispositions to learning, their choices of subject, courses and institution, and also other influences on their personal lives and identities. Thus, in Kate Stapley's case, the fact that art had not only evolved into her principal GCSE subject but had also come to form the central plank of her career aspirations is the key to understanding why she was prepared to

suppress her innermost feelings about the nature of knowledge in the subject areas of sociology and maths. For Amanda Ball, a preparedness to comply strategically with what she saw to be the requirements of her English course is to be seen within the context of a grander transformation. Her aspirations at her point of entry into FE were acting or archaeology. Subsequently, we were to learn that she withdrew from A-levels altogether, intending to return the following year to study for an Advanced GNVQ in business studies. Where had the archaeologist and the actress gone? The knowledge of Amanda's strategic compliance in English might plausibly be seen as a symptom of the early phases of her eventual retreat from A-levels which, in turn, can be understood only within the context of her transforming personal identity.

For all of the students described here, the wider, continually evolving contexts of their lives as young people are inextricably bound up in their dispositions to learning and their studentship – to which we turn next.

Chapter 4

Learning careers

In the previous chapter we showed that course choices, occupational aspirations, dispositions to learning and approaches to studentship can change. Here we address the ways in which they change, attaching importance to the inter-relationships between these various elements. To do this, we are developing Bloomer's (1997) concept of learning career, illuminated by work on the ways in which career choices are part of an evolving identity, done by Hodkinson et al (1996).

Learning career refers to the *development* of a student's dispositions to learning over time. Dispositions can best be understood as part of a wider habitus, so that changes in dispositions to learning are influenced by experiences outside as well as inside formal education, while experiences of formal education and dispositions to learning can and do influence and sometimes change other dispositions within the habitus. In these ways, dispositions to learning and the learning career are part of the evolving identity of a person. Our evidence shows that a central experience for many of our students was of FE as an important time and place of change.

Most students had not anticipated that their dispositions to learning might change in any profound way during the course of their time in FE. Though many expected that they would come to assume some greater responsibility for their own learning and that they might find new friends and that

they would have to meet new challenges of some kind or other, most assumed that they would remain more or less the same people with unchanged dispositions and aspirations.

Even those few students who had anticipated that they would become 'different persons' while in FE were little better prepared for what was going to happen to them than were their peers. When he made his A-level choices, Daniel Johnson had anticipated that his orientation to knowledge and learning would change over the following two years.

> *... so with my courses, I'm having to make allowances to a degree, to how much my mind's going to change ... I think that there's room to expand. I think I'm set in my character, if you like, but I want to expand lots of ideas.*

Daniel was trying to make some allowance for his own personal growth and development. However, towards the end of the first term he was expressing frustration that his courses had been insufficiently adaptable to his newfound needs.

> *I'd say, at the moment, I've written [sociology] off. But that's not to say that I'm totally shutting out the possibilities that it could interest me. I think also, what it was, was at the start we had a choice of the different parts of sociology that we could do; and I wanted to do certain things ... and I got completely out-voted by the rest of the class. ... I wanted to do 'power and politics' and they chose 'the family' – which is what we're doing at the moment – and I'm just finding that so ...* ***tedious****. So in that respect I feel a bit like I've had it before ... so this has all been against me from the start, you know. 'Cos it was like ... every time I voted for something, I was the only person voting for it! (all said with some humour).*

Daniel's changed disposition towards sociology can only be understood in relation to a range of other factors such as the teaching methods adopted, the make up of the student group and the subject matter to be studied. However, the idea of a learning career goes wider than this.

The way in which the concept of career is commonly used is rather different from the way we use it here. Armstrong (1987) claims that career carries the connotation:

> *... of a 'fixed and inevitable process'. The problem of career, of course, is that it has been taken from everyday language where it is most often used to imply a kind of vertical or horizontal movement through occupational structures, reflected by the use of such phrases as 'career development', which depicts career as having an ideal typical path of upward progression.*

Strauss (1962) makes a similar point. He suggests that we often describe careers according to one of two metaphors. The first is that of the career ladder. As our lives develop, we gradually climb in a direction that is clear and predictable to a knowledgeable outsider. Though plans and directions can change, these are seen as occasional aberrations when a person changes track, stepping (or falling!) from one ladder to another. The other metaphor for career development is that of cooking an egg. Whether we poach it, fry it, boil it or scramble it, it will always be recognisably an egg. Thus, it is assumed that a person has essential qualities which are unchanging, and whatever he/she eventually does, that essence remains recognisable.

Strauss claims that neither the ladder or the egg metaphor for career development is appropriate.

> *Development, then, is commonly viewed either as attainment, or as sets of variations on basic themes. In either case, you as the observer of the developmental pattern are omniscient; you know the end against which persons are matched, or you know the basic themes on which variations are composed. Neither metaphor captures the open-ended, tentative, exploratory, hypothetical, problematical, devious, changeable, and only partly unified character of human courses of action.*

He goes on to describe career development as a series of 'turning points'. 'These points in development occur when an individual has to take stock, to reevaluate, revise, resee, and rejudge' (p.71). Strauss claims that turning points are found in all parts of our lives. Learning careers can be seen as routine experiences interspersed with such turning points.

Through these routines and turning points, a career is 'the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions, and the things which happen to him' (Hughes, 1937, pp 409-410). Thus, learning careers are tied to transformations not only in dispositions but in habitus, personal identity, and studentship. These, in turn, are reflexively related to an external world where social, political, economic and moral changes are continuing apace, largely beyond the control of students or those holding responsibilities for them. The relationships between these variables are subtle, complex and often unpredictable. While there is certainly some scope for planning learning careers, much that unfolds cannot be planned with any certainty.

Patterns of learning career

Transition from school to FE was a potential turning point for all our students. An old, familiar life was being left behind and a new life in a new setting was beginning. Furthermore, this was the first time in their lives that most of our sample had been given the opportunity to decide more than a small part of their formal learning experience. Hodkinson et al (1996) refer to turning points like this as *structural*. That is, they are created by the institutional and/or societal structures, in this case the end of compulsory schooling. A second structural turning point would occur when students complete their FE studies and move on to something else.

Non-structural turning points may also have a profound an effect upon young people's learning careers. Examples include the formation of new relationships, the breaking of old relationships and the political, social, moral and economic events of the day. However, as all of our interviewees experienced the transition into post-16 education in a new institution, we will build the following discussion around this structural turning point and the periods of routine preceding and following it. It is helpful to think of

young people's learning career patterns as falling into three broad types. These are, 'little or no change', 'sudden transformations' and 'gradual evolution'.

Little or no change

Within learning careers of this type, the period between the end of Year 11 in school and the first term in FE was like a continuous period of routine. Transition was not a turning point, for there was no transformation in dispositions to learning. Hodkinson et al (op.cit.) call such routines *confirmatory*. That is, they confirm the starting dispositions and intentions of the people concerned. Thus, Ben Pallant's GCSE results and his experience of starting A-levels at the tertiary college confirmed his intentions to go to university and become an accountant. His dispositions towards learning remained largely instrumental and he adopted a largely conformist form of studentship.

Chris Figgitt's world did not change either. Knowledge was still viewed as external and absolute; learning was still preferably a passive activity; and problem-solving was still a matter of deduction to the single correct answer. As Chris's tutor, Ted Hallsworth, put it:

> *He's very bright but not in the sense of a quick and alert mind which is darting all over the place, going to be innovative and dynamic in the future. He's the sort of guy that I can imagine, if he went for research chemistry, he would be meticulous – doesn't mind doing the same thing ten thousand times and recording the statistical variations in somethin. ... He'll go to university; he'll probably get three Bs and will have a choice of most universities. He'll cope at university. He'll probably broaden out as a young man and by the time he's 21, 22, he'll probably talk to people a bit!*

Ted's observations appear to confirm that, as a learner, Chris was pretty much set in his ways, and his last remark suggests that Chris was unable or unprepared to impose himself upon his world – either his social world or his A-level physics world. As Ted later said, 'I suppose if he has a

weakness, I would say that he hasn't got very much confidence to do things ...' For the moment, Chris is clearly a case of 'no change'. However, in a later interview, he did mention that he had enjoyed a work experience placement in an accountancy firm and that he was no longer sure whether he would aim for a future career in science or in accountancy.

Others in this group started with no clear or strongly held career intentions, and that remained the case by the second interviews as well – even if there had been shifts in whimsical career ideas in the meantime. Many continued to see education as a preparation for an as yet undetermined future and/or saw education as something to be governed by intrinsic motivations such as interest and enjoyment. Samantha Grimsey said:

> *I'll do the subjects at sixth form college that I enjoy. I'd like to go to university but I don't know what to do. I've got no idea at this stage about careers. I'm very positive but I'm keeping my options open.*

Six months later she commented:

> *I'm enjoying my A-levels and I look forward to each class. I definitely want to go to university. I might do a joint honours degree based on my A-levels. But I won't let my degree choice be influenced by any particular career because I don't know what I want to do at this stage.*

For such students, early experiences of FE confirmed their dispositions and orientations. In Samantha's case, it appeared that any changes which had occurred in her dispositions to knowledge and learning were in the form of a confirmation, enhancement or extension of her learning career – a widening of focus rather than a significant movement in, or change of, perspective.

On the periphery of this 'little or no change' group are other students who were trying to sustain their existing identities, dispositions and career pathways, despite the setback of disappointing results. These were the students who were taking GCSE resits or Intermediate or Foundation GNVQs instead of their hoped-for A-levels or Advanced GNVQ courses. By our

second interviews they were seeking to maintain their starting career identities, for example by describing themselves as being on the same path but needing to take one or two more years to reach their desired destination. However, our second interviews came too early in their FE careers for us to determine whether the students were entering some confirmatory routine, or whether something different was about to happen.

Sudden transformations

The second type of learning career pattern that we observed entailed some form of transformation. That is, young people saw their learning careers differently in the second interview than in the first. Identifying members of this group was not always straightforward. As with all of the categories we have employed, boundaries are imprecise and decisions about inclusion or exclusion are value judgments. A particular problem with this group was identifying whether or not changes were significant or trivial, and this could only be done safely with the advantage of hindsight. We would not include in this group, for instance, young people whose only change was, say, that of a different third A-level while still sustaining their main dispositions and intentions. Nonetheless, a significant number of transformations could be identified.

Learning career transformations can be *forced* or *self-induced* (Hodkinson et al, 1996), or some combination of the two. Gary Cowgill experienced a forced transformation. He had intended to enrol for an Intermediate GNVQ course in catering and needed four GCSE grades D or better to be deemed eligible. During the first interview, he was enthusiastic about catering, following his work experience in a local restaurant. He was even talking about doing French to help get a job as a chef.

> *I want to be a chef and French cooking is something that I want to get involved in. So with different styles of cooking ... maybe the French could help. Maths is pretty important too ... because head chefs and the second chefs – when you get to that stage, you're ordering stuff and working out weights for the carvery and that.*

When Gary's results came out, he only had one GCSE grade D, and entry to the GNVQ course was not possible. He was offered a place to study for an NVQ level 1, but said, 'I didn't want to do that – it was totally different'. He talked to a careers officer who suggested Youth Training as the best way into catering. But Gary was not prepared to consider that: 'Some of the people from school went onto that and now they're getting £40 and having to work all week. That's a pound an hour. I'm not going to do that so I went and found my own job'. The job he found was working as an unskilled labourer in a warehouse, a job he took when he ran out of money. Ambitions to be a chef and his positive dispositions towards knowledge and learning in the form of full-time study in FE seemed to have evaporated.

Perhaps the best example of a self-induced transformation happened to Amanda Ball after our second interview had been completed. At the time of that second interview, she was enthusiastically embarking upon A-levels in theatre studies, philosophy and English literature, having, as we have seen, abandoned whimsical notions of being an archaeologist. However, she was certain that she wanted to do A-levels and saw herself as an 'expressive arts sort of person'. She was, in short, firmly within our first group, with no significant change. However, the interviewer bumped into her, in a supermarket, four months later. She had dropped out of her A-levels and had left college but expressed the intention of re-enrolling the following September to study Advanced GNVQ in business and administration. All we have to help understand this transformation are a few signs which, with hindsight, seem significant. Amanda had been living on her own since she was sixteen and was hard pressed with practical problems like getting enough housing benefit. Secondly, despite her choice of A-levels, in the second interview she talked of her new objective being to run her own public house (after spending some time in Italy, 'until the money runs out!'). Describing her A-level choices, she said:

> *If I decide to go into acting, (which is really improbable – I think that's probably just a dream) then they'll look at whether I've got theatre studies, and philosophy will probably stand me in good stead. So, I don't know, I've just got this idea at the moment where ... if I decide that I do want to own my own pub, there's gonna be a*

point when I'm gonna have to go to a bank manager and say 'Excuse me, I'd like a loan please' ...

With hindsight, there are two dominant impressions. The first is the almost Walter Mitty-like way in which her dreams for the future keep changing while making virtually no contact with the reality of her everyday life. The second is that, despite her obvious enjoyment of expressive arts, her commitment to it was not very deep. We can only hypothesise that her dispositions to learning and her linked career intentions were contradicted by the pressures of her life outside college and/or by her experiences within college after the second interview.

Luke Stockdale also went through a transformation after his second interview. At that time, he appeared to be starting on a *contradictory* routine. He had been forced to take the Foundation instead of Intermediate GNVQ owing to his poor GCSE examination results. But he claimed to find the course disappointing and unchallenging. He became disillusioned with college life and could no longer envisage taking four years to progress up the GNVQ ladder. When we interviewed him after he had dropped out of college, he said:

I hoped, like, I was going to get more out of it than what I did. Mind you, I was supposed to be doing a higher level at that time – I was going to do the Intermediate – but because of my grades I had to do Foundation, so that's probably one of the reasons wh. ... I was pretty keen on it when I first started in September, but as I started getting more bored of it and the months started dragging on, I started getting more bored of it ... and ... I just started to find that the course wasn't really for me. At the end of it ... I don't know that I'd've been able to cope with four years of it [GNVQ].

It is not possible to discern whether the changes in Luke's dispositions to knowledge and learning were attributable to the nature of the work, the fact that he was on a lower level course than the one he had anticipated, or a combination of these two reasons. It is possible that, if presented with the same work on an Intermediate course, Luke would have been strategically

compliant rather than retreatist. His story also illustrates the point that the boundary between self-induced and forced turning points is imprecise. Whether he jumped or was pushed is a matter of interpretation.

Gradual evolution: unfolding learning careers

Between 'no change' and 'sudden transformation' we detected numerous indications of a third type of learning career, largely absent from the earlier Youth Training study. This entails an evolutionary development with no sudden transformation, nor any discernible, significant contradiction. Rather, students' experiences of FE and the world beyond gradually impinge upon their dispositions, identities and sometimes their career intentions as they mature. Changes are subtle rather than dramatic. In our sample, 'gradual evolution' was frequently accompanied by maturing views about learning and the nature of knowledge and by an 'opening up' of ambitions for the future which were not immediately apparent in the earlier interviews.

For example, Charlotte Stickings in the first interview told us that she had originally wanted to leave school at the age of 16 and pursue a 'career in business'. She said that it was her parents who persuaded her to continue in education to the age of 18. She decided to study Advanced GNVQ in business and administration, being particularly attracted to its job relevance. At that time, she had vague notions of continuing with some unspecified part-time education, post-18. As we have seen, despite unexpectedly good GCSE results, she did not abandon the GNVQ. However, a combination of her growing self-confidence and the culture of the sixth form college meant that, by our second interview her outlook was changing in a way that enhanced rather than contradicted her previous learning identity. Her views of knowledge and learning and their purposes remained largely unchanged while her vague notions about a career in business had focused down to an ambition to work in accountancy. At the same time, her dispositions to learning had evolved so that she was now keen not only to continue in full-time FE but also to go to university once

her GNVQ was completed. She also talked of spending time abroad, probably studying, and was aware of her own changing self-confidence, expectations and ambitions.

Scott Everson, in his first interview, was shy and fairly inarticulate. He had a clear career ambition to be a computer programmer and was linking his choice of FE course to that ambition. He said,

> *I'll hopefully be doing BTEC [one of three examination bodies awarding GNVQs, now renamed EdExel] IT. I want to be a computer programmer. I haven't done much IT at school but I've got a computer at home. I don't think A-levels is as appropriate as BTEC for university IT courses. BTEC provides a wider range of skills. I want to go to university to do a degree in computing.*

Like Charlotte, Scott's GCSE results were much better than he had expected. Consequently, he was strongly advised by the college to switch from GNVQ to A-levels. He was willingly steered into business studies, IT and electronics.

> *Well, it was when they were doing my timetable and I was called up to one of the study rooms and they explained that if I did three As it would help me more to get into university than a GNVQ ... When I was called up ... I was still going to be doing [GNVQ] IT. They said this A-level IT was a new course, and what I didn't want to do was A-level computing.*

Scott found the transition into college easier than he expected and saw his A-levels as relevant to his future career needs. He had become much more self-confident and articulate and his dispositions to learning were evolving. His aspirations to go on to university remained and he had not abandoned his ambitions to work with computers. However, his horizons were widening and he was beginning to consider options that he had been unaware of and/or uninterested in six months before. When asked if his career plan was to get a job in computing, he said:

I would still like to, but there are other jobs I would like to do as well. I might change my mind and do a degree in electronics or business studies and then get a job in that area but I'll have to see, at the end of the course, which I prefer ... We're starting a compulsory short course in careers, for five weeks, and it might help me understand more what I want to do. And there is a Modern Apprenticeship Scheme for when you have finished your A-levels. We had a lecture on it yesterday. I could be at university in three years time, but there could be other choices.

Students like Scott pose a particular challenge for a commonly held view of what makes a logical career choice progression. In the British system, there is often an assumption that a young person's career aspirations should become progressively focused down. Yet for Scott, the opposite was happening. A narrow pre-16 focus was opening out into a wider range of possible career options, including directions he had never previously considered.

Many young people gave early indications of changes in their dispositions to knowledge and learning which appeared to be attributable primarily to in-course experiences or to their general social, political or moral maturation and which were not linked with subject or course decisions or with specific occupational careers. As seen in Chapter 2, Ryan Holloway's dispositions towards art, music and biology were in a constant state of flux. Also, Tamsin Rooke displayed a greater awareness of the disputability of knowledge and a new preference for interactive learning activities, following her transition from school to college. Kirsty Spiers spoke for many when she claimed that her tutor's expectations that she assume greater responsibility for her studies impacted upon her own approach to the task of learning and served to strengthen her resolve to succeed. Chloe Langford, whose experiences we have not referred to already, was not alone, particularly among GNVQ students, in claiming that course work had come to occupy most of her out-of-college hours and forced her to appraise her commitment to the course. In the event, she decided to sacrifice some of her social life and opportunities to earn a small income

through part-time work in order to maximise her investment in her college studies. Her claim, 'if you don't do it as you go along, then you just get far behind' indicates a hardened commitment to learning.

The case of Rosie Tyndall warrants a little closer attention. In her second interview, she had enthused about the ways in which learning opportunities were constructed and presented by her tutors.

> *... the way they do it is they show you first, and then you do it. And then they give you the theory after so you've got it there in your head how to do it. 'Cos when I did my work experience, I was watching and I found I learned quite a lot just from a week of watching people. But then afterwards, you look into the theory of it.*

For Rosie, it was very important that practical experience of hairdressing preceded any theorised account. However, by a third interview, it was apparent that she had become more aware of the demands of learning and of herself as a learner.

> *... the more I learn, the more it collects in my mind ... 'Cos you're going in and learning things you've never learnt before and, like, it's new, so it's all in different parts of your head. And then once you start to understand things more, it all pulls together and it's all related – everything that you do!*

Rosie had not fully realised at the time of the second interview that all the discrete elements of the hairdressing course would 'pull together'. Once she did, her enthusiasm for further learning was enhanced and her learning career was less tightly demarcated by her prospective hairdressing career; she now wanted to be a hairdressing teacher.

By way of a contrast, Ryan Holloway's experience of his tutor's construction and presentation of learning opportunities on his A-level biology course impacted negatively upon his dispositions to knowledge and learning:

What I've found is different and I think it's just her way of teaching, but she teaches us one thing and then she teaches us another and then after she's taught us these two things she explains what they've got in common. But ... like, say, there's a cycle: she teaches us each individual thing and then she teaches the cycle. If she taught us the cycle and then she taught us the individual things, I think me – I'd find it easier ... I'd rather see the whole first 'cos I'd rather know why something does this rather than it just does this.

Although the ways in which Ryan's and Rosie's tutors selected and organised course knowledge and learning opportunities had much in common, the two students responded very differently.

Predictability and unpredictability: planning and serendipity

Learning careers are not wholly unpredictable since, given enough knowledge of a person's dispositions and previous life history, some changes can be ruled out as unlikely and others can be seen to be possible and plausible. The metaphor of transformation reminds us that what a person transforms into is partly dependent upon who they were before the transformation took place. However, data from this study confirmed Strauss's (1962) view that, despite this truth, a considerable degree of unpredictability remains.

Most of the young people who participated in the study gave some indication of the unpredictability of their own learning careers while some, such as Kate Stapley (see Chapter 2) and Melissa Saunders volunteered quite vivid accounts. After her experiences of a college open day, Melissa had decided against studying sociology:

You didn't like what you saw was going on?

Yeah. I didn't like what the actual person, the teacher, said ... it was disorganised ... I mean you couldn't make out what the tutor was saying. I just didn't like it.

Four months later, having failed to obtain the GCSE grades that would have enabled her to progress to A-levels, Melissa was enthusiastically studying GCSE sociology.

Why did you take sociology?

Well, it was in the GCSE package. If you did two Englishes, you had to do sociology .... So it was, sort of, that I had to do it.

Are you enjoying it?

Yeah, it's really good. That's the best one really because I'm not retaking ...

You spoke so enthusiastically about sociology there. Would you actually consider doing that as an A-level now?

Definitely, yeah. Yeah.

Thus, predicting the exact path of any individual learning career is virtually impossible. Though predictions may work for a time, there is no way of knowing if or when they will change. We were taken aback by the changes in the learning career of Amanda Ball, even though we can begin to make sense of them with hindsight. Fazarna Moosa could easily have dropped out of college. In her second interview, there were signs, such as her disenchantment with GNVQ IT, that things might have continued to go wrong. With hindsight, there were also signs of the determination to succeed and pride in being at the sixth form college which eventually saw her through. Even for those, like Ben Pallant and Chris Figgitt, for whom we could detect no significant change in any aspect of their learning careers, the future may not be as smooth as they expected when we interviewed them.

Two related phenomena emerged as important in understanding learning careers. The first was the conviction with which young people tried to anticipate and thus plan for their future learning needs. Some were evi-

dently 'taking each step as it comes' while others had much more clearly and confidently held views of the future, as the contrasting cases of Sean Keating, Cara Livesey and Amanda Ball demonstrate.

Do you look at the future in a different way to how you used to, or ...?

I don't really look at things like that – I just tend to be more laid-back now ... I'm just quite happy to flow along and not really think about the past or the future ... (Sean)

I know what I want to do at the moment and I want to do it, basically, ... because I've known for a long time what I've wanted to do ... When I first said that I want to do hairdressing my teachers were like, 'You can't do that. That's a stupid career to do.'

Why were they saying that then?

They just ... I don't know ... it was just their reaction 'cos hairdressers have got a reputation for being stupid or ...

Did they feel you should be doing something else?

They wanted me to go to college and go to university and get a degree ...

Is that just not you?

Not at the moment, but if I change my mind I might decide that I want to do it. As I said before, I'd much rather do it when I really want to do it and get a first class rather than going along and failing my course. (Cara)

How far into the future do those plans go before they start becoming hazy?

They don't! (laughs) I've got my life planned out. I've got two roads: one – go to drama school and then hopefully get work in

theatres or, if I follow the path to archaeology, do that until I retire and then I'm going go and move to Spain (laughs again). And I've just got to choose which one I choose when I get to college. (Amanda)

The irony of Amanda's remarks has already been pointed out. Despite her claims to have planned for the future, her predictions proved to be every bit as insubstantial as ours were in her case.

There were considerable differences among students in respect of the extent to which they were able to link their present situations to any plans or aspirations, and the degree to which they felt that they could effect control over those plans and aspirations. Some, it was evident, had very underdeveloped concepts of the future while others had their futures clearly mapped out in their own minds and believed that they had the power to bring them to fruition. The long-established literatures of sociology and social psychology are full of studies linking such phenomena as time orientation and locus of control to cultural and even gender differences (Bernstein, 1961; Chance, 1972; Kluckhohn, 1951; Rotter, 1966; Strodtbeck, 1958).

The second related phenomenon is 'becoming a person'. Several of the young people claimed that they had become different people from the time of our first phase interviews.

What's changed?

It's me. I'm not as frightened as I was any more. I used to be, well ... I hadn't got any confidence in myself and so I didn't think I could get anything right, and so I wanted other people to be there to back me up all the time. But I've totally changed. I'm not as quiet as I was at school and I tend to be more outgoing. I think the confidence has come from being more independent. I would never have thought of going to the library and working before. (Charlotte Stickings)

For Alison Holt, having a new start in a new institution had helped her to change.

These people only know me from college and so they don't know what I was like at school. I've got more confidence and I organise my time better, a lot better. ... Teachers here would say I get my work in on time and I contribute to discussion in class. Teachers at school said I was shy and my English teacher said that was why I failed my oral – I never answered a question in English but I do now. I take part in everything in class.

Some young people displayed clear awareness of these 'transformations of their person', and recognised that what we call their learning careers could not be considered separately from wider issues of identity and what we would call their habituses. However, many others appeared to have far less awareness that they were changing, and none of those who seemed to be changing had any real insight into the persons they were to become six months later.

The reasons for this lack of precise predictability should by now be apparent. There are many inter-related factors involved in any learning career, only a few of which can normally be considered by those responsible for planning and/or providing formal education. We have given examples of ways in which all of the following factors might contribute to a modification and/or transformation of a learning career: examination results, new teachers, fellow students in a class, course content, types of course assessment, learning activities, college resources, course availability, institutional status, course status, family activities, financial circumstances, job opportunities, advice from a wide range of people, successful or unsuccessful experiences of studying, etc. The list of personal factors is as long and includes: self confidence, self esteem, dispositions to knowledge, dispositions to learning activities, career intentions, self perceptions, family relations, relationships with others, (part-time) employment, etc. Beyond this list are a range of serendipitous experiences and events which can influence learning careers, from family trips to Australia to watching archaeology programmes on TV.

Any of these can influence a learning career. What is more, they are all inter-related in the ways in which they can influence a person's habitus, and the impact of any single factor will often be quite different from

person to person. For example, the very factors which put Daniel Johnson off his A-level sociology course might well have reinforced the enthusiasms of others in the same group.

Finally, the transitional nature of FE in Britain contributes to the unpredictability of learning careers. For those entering FE from school, it is a period of maturation, of unfolding and developing personal identity, of transition, transformation and change. This picture of unpredictable transition and of the complexity of learning careers sits uncomfortably with some current policy assumptions about FE provision and funding. We explore these contradictions briefly in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Implications for policy and practice

Current British further education policy

Policies for FE in England and Wales have changed quite radically since the mid-1980s. During the last years of the Conservative government, changes had been so great that Hodkinson and Sparkes (1995) were moved to describe them as belonging to a new paradigm. In essence, that Conservative policy paradigm consisted of five central principles which sometimes conflicted with one another.

The first was a government commitment to individual responsibility for learning (HM Government, 1995). As part of the vogue for lifelong or lifetime learning (DfEE, 1996), the intention was that every person would be given responsibility for determining their own learning opportunities. The job of education providers was to facilitate this responsibility, by giving each student what he/she wanted/needed.

At first sight, this was neatly complemented by the second policy principle – that of educational markets driven by choice. At the time of our field-work, colleges were supposed to be competing against each other and against schools and other training providers to win the custom of their clients. The FEFC funding mechanisms were partly designed to facilitate

such a market. By, in effect, making payments on recruitment, retention and the eventual successful completion of educational qualifications, it was intended that colleges would be forced to put students' interests first.

The third principle emphasised educational outcomes. Thus, great emphasis was placed on achieving recognised educational qualifications in order to meet the National Targets for Education and Training (HM Government, 1995). Thus, most FE funding was derived from those qualifications approved to be included in 'Schedule Two'. This emphasis on outcomes was also intended to reinforce the market approach through the publication of results and league tables that were intended to help potential customers make the best informed choices.

The fourth policy principle was that of accountability and value for money. The funding mechanisms were designed to narrow differentials between colleges for what was deemed similar educational provision. This was done through a complex formula where average levels of funding were gradually driven downwards towards a norm well below the median level of funding prior to the introduction of the system. Also, the newly independent colleges were made accountable to national standards through a complex process of quality inspections.

Finally, in curriculum terms, FE policies were based on the principle of three essentially discrete tracks – academic courses (GCSEs, A-levels), full-time vocational courses (mainly GNVQs) and part-time vocational training (leading mainly to NVQs). Official policy was that these tracks were of equivalent status, but that they differed in terms of content, teaching styles and place of learning. The idea was that each young person should choose the track which 'best suits' them and progress along it. Gleeson and Hodkinson (1995) suggest that this three track system was doomed to failure in the British cultural context, partly because GNVQ was unlikely to be able to achieve the same status as A-levels, a suggestion later supported by the analysis of Robinson (1997) and the findings from this study. However, we did find evidence of GNVQs being used to rescue educational careers after poor GCSE results, as happened with Fazarna Moosa.

The research reported here is of central relevance to this policy paradigm, because we also made individual students the focus of our attention and explored some of the ways in which they actually responded to their FE opportunities. Our findings throw serious doubts on some of these principles, and suggest that others need to be interpreted differently if they are to succeed.

Matching educational provision to individual student needs

Our findings suggest that giving individuals responsibility for their own learning by matching, or helping them to match, learning opportunities to their wants and/or needs may be much more difficult than is sometimes assumed. Many of our sample did not know what their needs were and, for a significant minority, their wants were whimsical and ephemeral. Where this happens, it is sometimes assumed that the problem is a lack of good guidance. In our view, even the best quality guidance provision would not have fundamentally solved this problem for many of our sample. Guidance might have helped Amanda Ball realise the unlikelihood of a career as an actress. However, it could not, indeed should not, have prevented her from making what at the time seemed sensible choices. Similarly, many of our sample had no way of identifying that they would enjoy being given more responsibility for learning or discovering that their views counted towards knowledge if they had not experienced anything like that before.

Furthermore, most of the young people we interviewed were not playing the part which policy thinking assumed they would in the matching process. They were not choosing courses or subjects because they had worked out that the content and approaches to learning would suit their needs. Again, though guidance might help sharpen this process a little, young people cannot be forced to take proper, critical account of things they may regard as unimportant at the time their decisions are made. Nor can they be expected to make informed judgements of things which they had not experienced directly. This is particularly true over choice of institution. Many of our sample had never seriously considered alternatives.

A third problem is that for a significant proportion of young people, needs, wants and intentions or, as we would put it, dispositions to knowledge and learning, change over time. For some, what appeared a perfect match in May was inappropriate in October. The whole notion of matching courses and teaching styles to learners rests on the assumption that any changes would have been predictable at the time of decision making and would be 'containable' within the limits of a well taught course. In effect, current FE policies are designed on the assumption that most students will fall into our first category of learning career – that of little or no change, with a conforming routine following the original choice.

Finally, for those students whose GCSE examination results were disappointing, there was insufficient time for them to carefully think about their needs in a new situation. A number of our students were forced into courses they would not otherwise have considered. This group also demonstrate that even the best resourced and best organised colleges cannot always match courses to individual wants. Financial and other pressures require that colleges have viable groups and that those lecturers which some students find 'uninspiring' are still fully occupied.

Specialist curriculum pathways

Policy assumptions about the desirability of three parallel curriculum pathways are also challenged by our findings. The model of learning career that is implicit in a pathways model is one of linearity, of progressively narrowing specialisation and/or occupational focusing down on the basis of stable identities and dispositions to learning. Exceptions to this are presumed to be rare. However, in our study, it was this sort of progressively narrowing career pathway, with a clear end in view, that was rare. For some students the model appeared to be inverted. They began FE with narrow horizons which then seemed to be getting progressively wider. This brought about changes to dispositions to knowledge and learning, and only time will tell whether or not these changes precipitated conflict between newly unfolding learning careers and the essentially stable expectations attached to courses located securely within one or other of the curriculum pathways described here. Another group always saw their FE

choices as a way of keeping their options open. A third group discovered that their original subject, course or career choices had become inappropriate. In most cases, this new realisation was accompanied by changed dispositions to knowledge and learning and was part of a significant transformation of learning career.

When these findings are combined with the widely perceived status differential between GNVQ and A-levels; with the lack of information upon which many choices of course and subject were made; with the essential unpredictability of dispositions, learning careers and other personal growth and development within a wider habitus; with the ways in which the young people were themselves unable to predict the extent to which they would change as people once they entered FE; and with the whimsical and sometimes romantic nature of the career ambitions upon which some of them based their course and subject choices; the value of a three track system comes further into question, at least in the ways in which it is often described in policy terms.

Learning dispositions and teaching styles

As Stronach and Morris (1994) suggest, recent British educational policy debates are confused by frequently contradictory messages about teaching and learning. Within academic education, on A-level courses and especially in schools, the dominant message is that whole class teaching, teachers sharing their expertise, a strong content focus and externally set written examinations exemplify high quality provision. On the other hand, for vocational qualifications like GNVQ, the opposite is assumed to be the case. Good quality now means giving students 'responsibility for their own learning', providing the resources to allow students to work in ways best suited to their own needs, emphasising processes such as decision making, problem solving and evidence collection above content, and basing most assessment on a portfolio of evidence rather than a written examination. Few policy makers advocate both approaches simultaneously. Rather, each group of proponents tends to ignore, or ridicule, the pronouncements of the others. Where attempts are made to square the circle, it is often done

on the grounds of student learning needs. Some, it is suggested, are suited to formal academic learning; others will do better at more participative and experiential vocational learning. Students and courses are frequently typed in this way and yet, as this study has demonstrated, such typing is a gross distortion of reality. It denies the reality of students' ever-changing dispositions and learning careers and the fact that many are well disposed to a variety of approaches to learning. It denies the reality that many teachers employ a variety of strategies and that courses, by virtue of the presence of both teachers and students, are seldom constrained even by tightly prescribed ways of organising and presenting learning opportunities.

Our findings suggest that policy debate has missed a very important point. Though, at any one time, some students may prefer one approach to learning more than another, this situation is much more complex than is often recognised. Those dispositions to learning can and do change, due to a vast number of factors, many of which lie outside formal education. Also, the ways in which students react to the same educational experience vary widely from one student to another because of their differing dispositions to learning and because of the different ways in which those dispositions are inter-related with other aspects of their life and habitus. Finally, within relatively broad limitations, students develop their own complex strategies to take control of their learning, whatever their tutors do. They apply studentship.

Some of the conclusions to be drawn from this are unsurprising but the nature of the current educational debate in Britain makes them worth repeating here:

- There is no one best way of teaching or of providing learning opportunities.
- Young people can and do learn in a wide variety of ways.
- Any learning that takes place in FE is as much a result of students' actions, dispositions and learning careers as it is of the resources of the college and the activity of the teachers.

- Though some reported dissatisfaction with routine tasks like dictated notes, copying from text books and dry and uninteresting teacher presentations, many students still learn from such situations, sometimes compensating for teacher shortcomings in other ways.

Above all, our research supports those writers who insist that learning can only be understood in context. There is now a considerable body of literature that suggests learning can only be understood as a combination of concept (or skill), learning activity and the context in which that learning takes pla[illegible]rown et al, 1989; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Similarly, many argue that [illegible]nat is learned depends largely upon the existing schemata of the learner (Howard, 1987). Our findings suggest that both these perspectives contain some truth. Further, the notions of learning disposition and learning career go further, demonstrating the relevance of life histories and of contexts way beyond those of formal education.

All this suggests that the place of learning within British FE policy needs to be rethought. It cannot be regarded as something that is easily manipulable by a system of controlled inputs and measured outputs. Nor can it be treated as attainable through some simple matching of opportunities to stable dispositions. In our view, our findings cast serious doubts upon any system of payment by results, especially where the results are simply the achievement of qualifications. They suggest, for example, that current searches for effective ways of measuring 'value-added' educational achievements are hopelessly misguided.

Further education as transition

Thus far, our analysis has focused on those elements of recent FE policy that we felt were challenged by our findings. However, perhaps the strongest evidence to emerge from this study was the extent to which most of our sample were enthusiastic about what FE was doing for them, about the new learning opportunities they had discovered, and about the ways in which FE was helping them become different people. In effect, at least for our sample, in three contrasting colleges, FE is a notable success. In this

section we wish to blend some of our criticisms of current policy assumptions with this evidence of success, by suggesting that we look at FE in Britain in a different way.

For full-time students, aged 16 to 19 FE is a period of change and transition. It is a time of growing up, of experimentation, of transformation and/or of evolutionary development. Even for the minority in whom we could determine little change during their first three months, there are often signs of growth. Indeed, it could be argued that, if they had not changed by the time their time in FE was completed, education would have failed. The only way many of the changes and transitions noted here can be accommodated within contemporary policy models is as aberrations or mistakes. Yet, to many of our sample of young people, their changes and transitions were not mistakes but sources for celebration. Let us consider, therefore, how things might look if they are viewed not as mistakes but as desirable outcomes of FE. A plausible scenario goes like this.

As young people leave school, their entry into FE forces many to reconsider who they are. As increasing numbers stay on for an increasingly long period of time, the point at which hard career decisions have to be made recedes into the distance while uncertainty about the labour market means that, for many careers, it makes little sense to plan too tightly, several years in advance. Furthermore, many young people are encouraged by parents, teachers, friends and their own dreams to aim high. The system reinforces this with assertions that GNVQ is as good as A-level for getting into higher education. Further, perhaps because high staying-on rates are a relatively recent phenomenon in Britain, this country does not have a tradition, as do Germany and Japan, of gradually socialising people into narrowing career pathways, over several years (Okano, 1995). Moreover, in Britain this recently expanding staying-on rate is extending youth, and postponing full adulthood. At the same time, older patterns of straightforward working class career progression – following dad into the mines or mum into the factory – have largely disappeared.

FE might therefore be regarded as a time for widening horizons, in which new identities can be found and new career openings discovered. Judged against these simple criteria, the colleges were succeeding for many of our students. However, if such a view were broadly accepted, certain recent policies are clearly out of step:

- The FE curriculum needs to become broader and more integrated, not narrower and differentiated.
- Within such a wider, integrated, curriculum, divisions between vocational and academic studies should be reduced.
- Opportunities should be built in to allow considered changes of direction.
- Funding mechanisms should be adjusted to reward breadth, including non-examination provision, and to avoid penalising colleges when young people leave courses.

Conclusion: resisting or removing baleful influences

If FE is largely succeeding in providing young people with opportunities for personal growth and with time and space for change, it is our judgement that it is doing so despite considerable pressures which push in the opposite direction. However, our findings do give grounds for cautious optimism. They suggest that many FE practitioners are operating at a highly professional level, and that their students have sufficient resilience and a growing self confidence and independence, at least in the early months of their FE careers. Our conclusion is that the most important need for FE in the future is to acquire a different view of its purpose and nature from that which insidiously permeates policy discourses of the 1990s. On the basis of our findings here, we would suggest that personal growth and learning careers provide a focal point for such thinking.

Central to any such new conceptualisation must be the avoidance of some commonly expressed 'false opposites'. For example, it is possible to believe strongly in student responsibility for learning without subscribing either to the view of students as customers, or as entities with fixed needs that

should be matched. It is also possible to believe in participative, student-centred learning, using a variety of approaches and with negotiation between staff and students as a central feature without assuming that all teaching must be like that, or that there can never be a place for high quality didacticism. Similarly, the case for effective guidance for students does not depend on the importance of them making 'correct' choices. FE as a transitional process could be sensibly built around appropriate guidance procedures. It is possible to believe in the importance of quality in educational provision without assuming that everything can and should be measured. If we cannot evade terms like 'value for money', we need to devote more care to determining what it is that is of value. For many of our students, this has included acquiring greater self-confidence and maturity and developing new dispositions to knowledge and learning. Finally, it is possible to value highly the impact of colleges and college staff on students' learning without somehow assuming that students can and will only take control of that learning if staff force them to do so.

In short, FE is embarking on a new phase in a partly new world. Our evidence suggests that, from a students' point of view, many things are going well, despite serious flaws in recent policy approaches. It is for FEDA, the colleges themselves and others involved in FE to strive to determine with the government, more appropriate agendas for the future.

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Notes

1 Though this book was published some months after the Labour government came to power in May 1997, it should be remembered that the data collected here are from FE under the previous Conservative administration. Furthermore, the book was largely written while the Conservative government was in power. Consequently, what follows is an analysis of a past situation, but one which contains many important policy and practice implications for the future.

2 The project is **The Experience of the Learner in FE: a longitudinal study** and it is funded by FEDA. We are grateful for their financial support and on-going advice.

3 Ainley, P and Bailey B (1997) *The Business of Learning*which includes express reference to students' experiences of learning, was published after this report had gone to press.

4 A full list of the 79 students and their basic details is reproduced in the Appendix .

5 In fact, all 50 young people were followed through for a further 18 months, and the last three cycles of interviews had not been completed at the time of writing. This book focuses on the first part of the research only.

6 'Receptive learning activities' were those where course tasks were relatively tightly prescribed, where teachers and printed materials provided the main sources of course knowledge and where learning depended upon the efficient flow of information from these sources to the learner. 'Interactive learning activities' were those where students 'acted upon' a wider range of knowledge sources in the generation of new knowledge and understanding and assumed a greater responsibility for more widely prescribed activities and assignments.

7 While there were few observable differences between GNVQ and other courses in terms of learning activities, we should note that the results of the small quantitative study which accompanied our project indicated that young people on GNVQ courses reported greater

improvements in their learning and their personal, social and career development than did students on other courses. How these were achieved is the subject of investigation in the project extension.

8 The categories used here (conformism, retreatism, innovation and strategic compliance) bear a strong relationship to, and are partly derived from, Merton's (1968) typology of modes of individual adaptation.

Appendix: The 79 students at Year 12

The selection of students and others for interviewing was done on the basis of 'interesting', *not* representative, cases. While examples from all categories of student described in the original sampling matrix have been included, selection of particular cases has been determined by their *theoretical relevance* to the research. Thus, the following list is not representative and should not be regarded as such in any interpretation of this study.

The selection is followed on page 102 by a key to the abbreviations used for colleges and courses.

Year 12 Destinations			
Name	**Intended college**	**Course (level)**	**Subject(s) or Vocational Area**
Waqas Ali	SF	GNVQ (Int.)	BStudies
Nicola Bainton	FE	GCSE (retake)	E+Ps+CS+ G+HuB
Amanda Ball	T	A-level	Th+Phil+E
Tim Bennett	SF	Not known	
Tim Beresford	FE	Proceeded to work-based training (no detail given)	
John Blackshaw	FE	GCSE (retake)	Ma+Mu+Geo+CS+HuB
Robin Blewett	FE	GCSE	Ma+CSt+Geo+CS+So
Eric Blunden	T	Proceeded to full-time employment.	
Michael Bradstock	SF	A-level	Ch+Ma+B
James Bucknall	T	GNVQ (Adv.) + (1 A-level)	L&T + (Geography)
Tanheed Burondker	SF	Not known	
William Carvill	T	Proceeded to block release course (no detail given)	
Kenneth Chung	SF	GNVQ (Adv.)	Engineering
Harriet Cornish	T	Proceeded to full-time employment	
Simon Corrigan	SF	A-level	ELa+ELit+MS
Gary Cowgill	T	Did not proceed to FE but sought employment	
Lucy Dickin	T	Int. Bacc.	Ph+Ch+Ma(h)+Eng+Fr+Ps
Michael Dommett	T	Not known	
Lorraine Eastment	T	A-level	Th+E+Ps
Scott Everson	SF	A-level	IT+BS+Electronics

Year 12 Destinations			
Name	**Intended college**	**Course (level)**	**Subject(s) or Vocational Area**
Kevin Farmer	T	GNVQ (Adv.)	Const. & Built Env.
Lee Fenwick	FE	Not known	
Alex(andra) Field	T	Not known	
Christopher Figgitt	T	A-level	Ph+Ch+Ma
Liam French	T	GCSE (retake)	Ma+E+BS+Ps+Accy
Ross Glover	FE	A-level	So+E+Govt & Politics
Samantha Grimsey	SF	A-level	H+Fr+Ps
Sally Haines	T	A-level (& AS)	Da+MS+(Gen St)
Lee Hardy	FE	Working in a night club	
Ryan Holloway	T	A-level	Art+Music+Biology
Alison Holt	SF	GNVQ (Adv.)	Health & Social Care
Shelley Hughes	T	Proceeded to full-time employment.	
David Jamieson	T	BTEC Nat. Dip.	Media Studies
Daniel Johnson	T	A-level	Theatre Studies+So.+E
Sean Keating	T	A-level	PE+HuB+Psychology
Ishtiaq Khan	SF	A-level	Maths+Physics+IT
Mark Knight	T	GNVQ (Adv.)	Engineering
Chloe Langford	T	GNVQ (Adv.) + (1 GCSE)	H&SC + (Maths)
Cara Livesey	T	NVQ 2 with an appship	Hairdressing with manicure and make-up
Edward Manasse	T	Proceeded to full-time employment	

Year 12 Destinations			
Name	**Intended college**	**Course (level)**	**Subject(s) or Vocational Area**
Marcus Merriman	SF	Not known.	
Jonathan Millett	T	GNVQ (Adv.)	Const. & the Built Env
Fazarna Moosa	SF	GNVQ (Int.)	IT
Michelle Moss	SF	Not known	
Kelly Mullens	T	Transferred to neighbouring direct grant school	
Abdul Mushtaq	SF	A-level	Ma+Ph+Electronics
Benedict Nugent	SF	Not known	
Ben Pallant	T	A-level	Bus Stud+Accountancy+Pol
Arisa Patel	SF	A-level	English Lit.+Art+Maths
Kulsum Patel	SF	Not known	
Denis Penfold	FE	Not known	
Christian Pryde	T	Not known	
Lauren Purvis	T	A-level + (GCSE)	Comm,Studs.+E+(Ma)
Tracey Rayden	T	Not known	
James Renouf	T	A-level	Ph+Ma+Art
Tamsin Rooke	FE	BTEC (Nat. Dip.)	Nursery Nursing
Matthew Ruck	T	A-level + (GCSE)	Photo.+Media St+(Maths)
Philippa Rule	T	Int. Bacc.	Eng+Psy+Art(h)+Fr+Ma+Ch
Melissa Saunders	T	GCSE (retake)	Maths+Eng(2)+Sociology
Patrick Saunders	T	Int. Bacc.	Eng+Fr+Hi(h)+Ma+Ch+Ger
Donna Spence	T	Int. Bacc.	Ma+Eng+Hi(h)+Psy+Ch+Fr

Year 12 Destinations			
Name	**Intended college**	**Course (level)**	**Subject(s) or Vocational Area**
Kirsty Spiers	T	GNVQ (Found.)	Business Studies
Kate Stapley	FE	Proceeded to art & design college (FE sector college); studying Regional Advisory Council Foundation Course in Art	
Charlotte Stickings	SF	GNVQ (Adv.)	Business Studies
Luke Stockdale	T	GNVQ (Found.)	Business Studies
Nadine Sturman	T	A-level + (GCSE)	English+Law+(Maths)
Jody Swann	FE	Not known	
Marie Tett	SF	A-level	Ps+Eng. Lang+Spanish
Becky Thompson	FE	Not known	
Gemma Thorne	T	Family moved to neighbouring county	
Rosie Tyndall	T	NVQ 2	Hairdressing & Beauty
Selina Walker	FE	Family moved to neighbouring county	
Jacinda Ward	T	Not known	
Melanie West	T	GNVQ (Int.)	Health & Social Care
Sarah Whiting	FE	A-level (GCSE)	Psy+Socio.+(Ma)
Mark Willis	FE	Not known	
Tom Wyatt	T	A-level (AS/GCSE)	Music+Art/Des(Fren/Photo)
Kevin Vokes	T	GNVQ (Found.)	Automobile Engineering.
Sakina Zaman	SF	Transferred to neighbouring direct grant school	

Key to appendix

Intended college

FE	further education
SF	sixth form
T	tertiary

Subject(s) or vocational area:

A	= Art	Acc	= Accountancy
A/D	= Art/Design	B	= Biology
BS	= Business Studies	Ch	= Chemistry
Com	= Computing	Con	= Construction & the built environment
CS	= Communication Studies	Da	= Dance
D&T	= Design & Tec.	E	= English (Lang. or Lit.)
Ec	= Economics	Eng.	= Engineering
G	= German	Geo	= Geography
H	= History	HSC	= Health & Social Care
HuB	= Human Biology	I	= Italian
IT	= Info. Technology	L&T	= Leisure & Tourism
Ma	= Maths	MS	= Media Studies
Mu	= Music	Ph	= Physics
Phil	= Philosophy	Phot	= Photography
Po	= Politics	Ps	= Psychology
So	= Sociology	Th	= Theatre Studies

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Caught between school and college, 79 Year 11 secondary school pupils were interviewed – first before their GCSEs and then through their first year in FE – about the nature of knowledge, learning activities and life in college. This fascinating analysis of their words, their actions and their prospects shines a startling new light on curriculum policy and management, and illumines the concept of transition and growth in further education.

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ISSN 1460-7034 Vol 2 No 3 Price £12.00